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New York

President:	Mrs. Cordova Soria	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
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	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Namibia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Uruguay, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem.

Mr. Mladenov is joining us via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Chargé d'Affairs a. i. of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; and His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer, League of Arab States to the United Nations.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: Every month, I brief the Council on the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian question. Every month, we speak of how continuing settlement construction and the demolition of Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank undermine the very foundations of the prospect of a sovereign Palestinian State. We condemn terror, violence and incitement that eat away at the trust between Israelis and Palestinians, and we call for unity and reconciliation. Every month, we appeal to political leaders on both sides to find their way back to the table for negotiations, to reverse the negative trends on the ground and to restore hope that it is through peaceful negotiations, not violence, that both Israelis and Palestinians will be able to live side by side, masters of their own fate.

Day after day, however, we see the situation on the ground slipping in a different direction. We see it sliding into a one-State reality of perpetual occupation and violence that does not serve peace; we see the international consensus on how to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict being challenged. Yet we all understand that without a negotiated resolution based on the final-status issues — as they have been defined by Israelis and Palestinians themselves — there can be no sustainable peace that realizes the national, historic and religious aspirations of both peoples. It is our shared responsibility to restore that prospect, to facilitate negotiations, to help the weaker party, to insulate the process from radicals and extremists and to show results.

Before I turn to the most urgent questions related to the situation in Gaza, I would like to begin with developments in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where violence is on the rise and the Israeli authorities have continued the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian-owned structures. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 39 structures were demolished or seized in the West Bank, including five in East Jerusalem, displacing approximately 33 people and affecting the livelihoods of over 100 others. Thirty-

four of the targeted structures were in Area C, including five installed in solidarity with Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu, the Bedouin community at imminent risk of demolition and displacement. On 23 September, the Israeli authorities requested the residents of Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu to self-demolish their homes by 1 October or face demolition by the authorities, in line with the 5 September final ruling of the Israeli High Court. On 8 October, the authorities extended the validity of land requisition orders for roadwork to enable the demolition. The community was given one week to object to the order.

Khan Al-Ahmar is among the 18 communities located in or adjacent to the controversial E-1 area, where plans for new settlement construction would create a continuous built-up area between the Ma'ale Adumim and East Jerusalem, undermining the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, along with the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, the League of Arab States and others, have called on Israel not to go ahead with its plan to demolish the village. I once again join that call for a cessation of demolitions and other measures that run contrary to Israel's obligations under international law.

All structures lacking permits from the Israeli authorities in Area C and East Jerusalem, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain, are potentially subject to demolition. While the rate of demolitions has declined since the beginning of 2017, over 13,000 demolition orders are pending against structures in Area C, three-quarters of which are on private Palestinian land.

Meanwhile, on 14 October the Israeli Government reportedly approved the allocation of $6 million for advancing the construction of 31 housing units in the Jewish settlement in Hebron, which would be the first new construction there in 16 years. I reiterate the long-standing United Nations position that all settlement activities are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace.

Violent incidents also continued in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Among those, on 7 October an Israeli man and woman were shot dead by a Palestinian man in the Barkan Industrial Area in the West Bank. The assailant fled the scene and the Israeli security forces are currently carrying out a widespread search operation in the area. On 12 October, a Palestinian woman was killed near a checkpoint south of Nablus; she had been injured by stones allegedly thrown by Israeli assailants. I extend my condolences to the bereaved families. Such incidents must be condemned in the strongest of terms, and I call on everyone to stand up to violence and condemn terror.

Settler-related violence is also a continuing concern. There were 23 attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians, resulting in 1 death, 12 injuries and property damage. To date in 2018, according to OCHA, over 1,600 Palestinian-owned trees have been vandalized across the West Bank. As the annual olive harvest begins, concerns are particularly high. I call on the authorities to ensure smooth access of Palestinian farmers to their land and that sufficient measures be taken to protect farmers and their property from attacks.

In recent weeks, protests at the Gaza fence have expanded to include night demonstrations. Hamas and other militants continued to send incendiary kites and balloons across the border, causing fires on the Israeli side. The Israeli Defence Forces have responded with riot dispersal means and live fire. Thirty-three Palestinians, including nine children, have been killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations and other incidents. Soldiers were meanwhile injured.

Intense clashes took place at the Gaza fence during Friday protests on 12 October, in which an estimated 20,000 Palestinians participated. Seven people were killed and over 150 injured by live fire on that day alone. Incendiary kites launched from Gaza started fires, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated at the fence and a group of protesters breached the fence and entered Israeli territory on that day. In addition, overall during the reporting period, Palestinian militants fired two rockets that landed in Israel. Israel responded by launching 45 missiles and shells at sites in the Gaza Strip.

In the early hours of 17 October, Palestinian militants fired a rocket from central Gaza towards Israel that hit and significantly damaged a residential house in the Israeli city of Beersheba. The city, some 40 kilometres from Gaza and well beyond the ring of communities in the immediate vicinity of the Strip, can be reached only by medium-range rockets. After the 9 August Grad rocket that landed in the outskirts of Beersheba, that was the second projectile to reach such a distance since the 2014 conflict. Three Israelis were reportedly injured. A second rocket landed in the sea

south-west of Tel Aviv. The Israeli air force responded with a series of air strikes, firing at several locations, most of them identified as military sites around Gaza. One Palestinian militant was killed and at least two were injured in a strike on a group that was in the process of launching rockets.

On 11 October, the Israeli Defence Forces announced that they had destroyed another tunnel extending from near the city of Khan Yunis in Gaza, some 200 meters inside Israeli territory.

In response to violence at the fence, for the third time since March, on 7 October Israel reduced the permissible fishing area off the Gaza coast from nine to six nautical miles. Again on 17 October, following the rocket attack on Beersheba, Israel further reduced the fishing zone to three nautical miles and closed all crossings between Israel and Gaza.

I brief the Council today as we enter a pivotal phase in Egyptian-led efforts to overcome intra-Palestinian divisions. I would like to convey two very clear messages to the Council.

The first is that the situation in Gaza is imploding. That is not hyperbole; it is not alarmism. It is a reality. The World Bank recently warned that the Gaza economy is in free fall, with an official unemployment rate of 53 per cent and over 70 per cent among Palestinian youth. Every second person in Gaza now lives below the poverty line. All key indicators — humanitarian, economic, security and political — continue to deteriorate. We remain on the brink of another potentially devastating conflict — a conflict that nobody claims to want, but a conflict that needs much more than just words to be prevented.

As I have outlined in detail in recent months, the United Nations and its partners have engaged, in response to requests from several Security Council members, in an extraordinary effort to stabilize the situation in Gaza and prevent an escalation. We have done so in full coordination with Egypt and in full transparency with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The effort has aimed at avoiding war and facilitating a return to the informal understandings reached in 2014 to maintain calm. That will not only alleviate the suffering of 2 million Palestinians, but will give political leaders time to achieve progress in reconciliation. Since the beginning of this process, the United Nations has firmly held that we need to make every effort to return Gaza to the control of the legitimate Palestinian Government.

But let me assure the Council that, barring substantial steps to reverse the current course, this precarious sense of calm is doomed to give way under the mounting pressure. It is already beginning to fray. Recent days have seen tensions and violent confrontations rising again. That should be of great concern to all of us. The gravity of the situation compels us to take decisive action.

The latest rockets that were fired from Gaza towards Beersheba are a dangerous escalation of the situation. Unfortunately, they also fit a pattern of provocations that seek to bring Israel and Gaza into another deadly conflict. It is our responsibility to do everything possible to avoid that outcome. I am afraid that there is no more time for words. Now is the time for action, and we must see very clear actions on all sides that de-escalate the situation. Otherwise, the consequences will be terrible for everyone.

My second key message is cautiously more optimistic. There is a growing consensus and determination among key international and regional partners on moving forward to defuse the powder keg that is Gaza. On 27 September, a ministerial meeting on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was held on the margins of the high-level general debate. Member States contributed generously to the Agency, raising some $122 million. This very impressive collective international effort has prevented an immediate shutdown of key UNRWA services, including in Gaza. Nevertheless, a significant funding gap remains.

Also on 27 September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) agreed on the implementation of an urgent set of humanitarian projects in Gaza. Those interventions are aimed at addressing the immediate energy, water, sanitation, health care and economic needs of the population. The goals are concrete, realistic and achievable. There is no discussion of projects such as airports, seaports or sea channels. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government of the State of Qatar for its swift and generous response to the AHLC call by providing some $60 million for fuel to increase the supply of electricity in the Gaza Strip.

Relieving the humanitarian pressure on the ground will reduce the threat of escalation and give space for Egyptian-led efforts to return the legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza. The Middle East Quartet has also endorsed that approach. Disengaging from Gaza, plunging it into another conflict or tightening the closures furthers the divide, with devastating humanitarian and political consequences for the Palestinian national cause.

I appeal to all Council members and to all friends of Israel and Palestine to join the United Nations in calling on all sides to step back from the brink. All parties must maintain their continued commitment to the 2014 ceasefire arrangements. Hamas and other militant groups must immediately and effectively stop all provocations and attacks, including rockets and mortars, IEDs, attempts to breach the fence, incendiary balloons and kites and tunnel construction, and rein in all violence at the border. Israel must restore the delivery of critical supplies to Gaza and improve the movement and access of goods and people, and Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint in the use of live ammunition. The Palestinian Authority must not disengage from Gaza and must continue its engagement with the international community to help alleviate the suffering of its people in Gaza. Any effort by any party to block the provision of critical assistance designed to relieve humanitarian suffering must not be tolerated.

These steps are only temporary and aim at avoiding war. We must never forget that, at its heart, Gaza is not a humanitarian problem. It is a political problem. Humanitarian efforts are taking place in coordination with and in support of Egyptian efforts to bring Gaza back under the full control of the legitimate Palestinian Government. The Government's return to Gaza and the lifting of the suffocating movement and access restrictions are necessary for addressing not only the humanitarian and economic needs of the population in a sustainable manner, but also the very important political challenges ahead.

In addition to the unification of all Palestinians under one single, legitimate Palestinian National Authority, the bigger picture must also be addressed — an end to the occupation and the realization of a two-State solution based on relevant United Nations resolutions, with Gaza as an integral part. Make no mistake — the consequences of failure would be severe, just as the benefits of success would be profound.

Briefly turning to Lebanon, the country has entered its fifth month without a Government. Prime Minister-designate Hariri continues consultations for an agreement on a national unity Government. I hope that the political stakeholders will soon overcome their differences and provide Lebanon with a new Government that can deliver on its commitments vis-à-vis its citizens and the international community.

While the situation in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line remained calm, the rhetoric between Israel and Lebanon underpins a risk of miscalculation. It is essential that the parties refrain from provocative actions and renew their commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) in word and deed. Furthermore, I call on the Lebanese authorities to complete the investigation into the 4 August attack on a patrol of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

Turning to the situation on the Golan, military conflict on the Bravo side ceased in late July, with the Syrian Government regaining control of parts of the area of separation that had previously been under the control of various non-State armed opposition groups. In recent weeks, low levels of military activity have been observed in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) has assessed that this is due to controlled detonations of explosive ordnance as part of the clearance by Syrian security forces. I personally visited UNDOF facilities in the Israeli-occupied Golan on 4 October and was encouraged with the progress made in implementing the phased UNDOF plan for the continued return of forces to the Bravo side. I welcome the reopening on 15 October of the Quneitra crossing, which was facilitated by the parties to the 1974 Separation of Forces Agreement.

In closing, let me reiterate that we must break out of the endless cycle of emergency responses and stop-gap measures. The Palestinian people — whether they live in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in Gaza, or as refugees in the region — deserve sustainable and just solutions, just as the people of Israel deserve peace and security. Both deserve to have their national dignity and identity respected and to build a better future for themselves and their families. Palestinians deserve to be masters of their own fate, to be governed by democratically elected institutions, to have a State of their own that lives in peace and security with the State of Israel — without the walls of occupation, without the fear of reprisal or displacement, and certainly without

the fear that the entirety of their lives will be spent struggling with no end in sight.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his important briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. El-Ad.

Mr. El-Ad: It is very difficult, if not impossible, to fully convey the indignity, the outrage and the pain of a people denied the benefit of human rights for more than 50 years. Here in this Chamber, it is hard to articulate the flesh-and-blood meaning of the exposed lives Palestinians endure under occupation. But no matter how hard it is to describe, the real hardship is that of facing such an intolerable existence day in and day out, trying to live, raise a family and develop a community under those conditions.

It has been almost two years to the day since I last had the honour of speaking before the Council — two more years of occupation, two years in which the routine of the first 49 years of occupation continued. Since I last spoke here, 317 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces and 13 Israelis have been killed by Palestinians. Israel has demolished 294 Palestinian homes and has continued making arrests on a daily basis, including of minors. Israeli settlers have vandalized and uprooted thousands of olive trees and grapevines. Israeli security forces have continued to regularly enter Palestinian houses, sometimes coming in the dead of the night to wake children, register their names and take their pictures. Palestinians have lost countless hours waiting at checkpoints with no explanation. And so, the routine of the occupation marches on.

All of that is often referred to as the status quo. Yet, there is nothing static about that reality. It is a calculated and deliberate process of slowly splitting up an entire people, while fragmenting their land and disrupting their lives, separating Gaza from the West Bank, breaking up the West Bank into small enclaves and walling off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. Eventually, what remains are isolated bits that are easier to oppress — a family slated for eviction in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan; a community, such as Urif, south of Nablus, trying against all odds to hold on to its land and farm it in the face of Israel's long arm of unchecked settler violence; and all of Area A of the West Bank, conveniently said to be under full Palestinian control, but, in fact, essentially comprising large bantustans, slowly but surely being hemmed in by an increasing number of new or expanding Israeli settlements.

None of that is random. All of it is policy-driven. Two of the most recent and most conspicuous examples are Israel's conduct in the recent protests in Gaza and its plans for Khan Al-Ahmar, a Palestinian shepherding community. Some 200 people live in Khan Al-Ahmar, just a few kilometres east of Jerusalem, in an area where Israel has long endeavoured to minimize the Palestinian presence and expand settlements. Israel plans to raze the entire community, claiming that all its structures were built illegally. The Government further claims that it has generously offered to relocate the community, even going so far as to guarantee that it would foot the bill for the relocation site. Israel also contends that its actions are legitimate. The High Court of Justice had given its seal of approval, had it not? But such claims are nothing short of distortions, carefully constructed by eager attorneys building on the unsound and unjust foundations of hollow legal formalisms.

First, there is no argument that the homes were built without permission from the Israeli authorities. But that is the case not because Palestinians are inherently law-breakers, as some in Israel suggest; rather it is because they have no other alternative. It is almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits from the Israeli authorities because the Israeli-established planning regime in the West Bank is meant by design to serve settlers and dispossess Palestinians.

Secondly, the Government failed to mention that the two relocation sites that it so generously offered leave something to be desired. One is beside a garbage dump and the other is next to a wastewater treatment facility. Moreover, relocation would completely undermine the community's ability to make a living.

Lastly, in its ruling, the High Court completely ignored the reality of the planning regime in the West Bank. The fact that the High Court approved the Government's decision does not make the demolition just or even legal. It only makes the justices complicit by proving that the action is nothing short of the war crime of the forcible transfer of protected people in an occupied territory.

With a population of nearly 2 million, the Gaza Strip has essentially become an open-air prison. Its inmates have been staging protests for the past six months, after suffering for more than a decade under an Israeli-imposed blockade that has led to economic collapse,

soaring unemployment rates, polluted drinking water, dwindling power supplies and, ultimately, deep despair. Since 30 March, more than 5,000 Palestinians have been injured by live Israeli gunfire and more than 170 have been killed, including at least 31 minors. The youngest were just little boys. Majdi Al-Satari, Yasser Abu Al-Naja and Nasser Musabeh were just 11 years old when they were killed.

As with Khan Al-Ahmar, Israel's High Court of Justice found Israeli policies vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip to be legal on a range of issues, from authorizing various aspects of the blockade to recently approving rules of engagement that allow Israeli snipers to continue firing from a distance at demonstrators inside Gaza. The only problem with all of that is that none of it is legal or moral or even remotely acceptable. Yet, as long as that methodical, relentless process does not trigger international outrage and international action, Israel can successfully continue to carry off that contradiction in terms — oppressing millions, while somehow still being considered a democracy. That, in a nutshell, is the pattern that the occupation follows. Israeli institutions, in which Palestinians have no representation, move pieces of paper along a well-choreographed disassembly line. How do we legalize the demolition of that community? How do we whitewash yet another killing? How do we take over that plot of Palestinian land?

With more than 50 years of experience, we have had plenty of time to perfect that well-oiled farce. We are now quite the experts at constructing a facade of legality, which has been very successful in allowing us not to have to deal with any real international consequences. None of those actions has anything to do with security, as Israel tries to argue. However, they affect the amorphous construct called the Middle East peace process. If one looks beyond the blinders of the process, it is clear to see how its supposedly yet to be negotiated outcome is, in reality, being dictated day in and day out by unilateral Israeli actions.

The only thing being processed here is Palestine. Consider the following historical analogies. Voter suppression was a cornerstone of the American south, under Jim Crow laws. But we have done one better — delivering no less than voter obliteration. As the occupied Palestinians remain non-citizens, not only can they not vote but they have absolutely no representation in the Israeli institutions that govern their lives. I will take a look at the discriminatory planning mechanisms and the separate legal systems in the occupied territories. They are reminiscent of South Africa's grand apartheid. Granted, neither analogy is a perfect fit but history does not offer us precision. It offers us a moral compass, which points towards rejecting Israel's oppression of Palestinians with the same unwavering conviction with which humankind's conscience rejected those other grand injustices.

Israel, however, appears to be following a different compass. While doing so, it is also busy removing any obstacles that might keep it from its objective. Ongoing efforts to legislate against Israeli human rights organizations now go hand in hand with the routine in which opposition to the occupation is being equated with treason. The Israeli Government's statements ahead of today's Council meeting are just one more unfortunate example of the spirit of the times. Therefore, I say to Prime Minister Netanyahu that he will never silence us or the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who reject a present founded on supremacy and oppression and stand for a future built on equality, freedom and human rights. I am not a traitor, nor am I a hero. The heroes are the Palestinians who endure the occupation with courage and perseverance, wake up in the middle of the night to find soldiers barging into their homes, know that if a loved one is killed, impunity is all but guaranteed to the perpetrators and stay on their land, knowing that it is only a matter of time before the bulldozers arrive.

I am one of a team of some 40 committed Israelis and Palestinians. We do not focus on how many is the right number of States to achieve a solution. Instead, we focus on the realization of human rights. That is why we reject the occupation. We reject it because the current reality is wholly and utterly incompatible with what is right and what is just. It is a reality wholly and utterly incompatible with a life of freedom and dignity for all 13 million people — Israelis and Palestinians alike — living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. And that is the future we strive for. Even if it now seems far off, and receding ever further away, we can make that future a reality. Assertive international action can make it happen. It is the only viable non-violent option. The world must let Israel know that it will no longer stand idly by and that it will take action against the continued dismantling of the Palestinian people.

The rules-based international order will not defend itself, and the successful fragmentation of Palestine is detrimental to Palestinians and Israelis alike, as well

as to international law and the values enshrined in it. It is the role of the Security Council and the delegations seated in this Chamber to oversee precisely that. The stakes are high. The Security Council must take action. In fact, it has already decided to do so, even if in a very limited fashion. However, it is a matter of record that the Secretary-General has so far had little to report to the Council on the implementation of paragraph 5 of resolution 2334 (2016).

Before closing, I would like to take us all back to Khan Al-Ahmar. The need for action there is acute and urgent. As Israel tests the international community's resolve to see how far and how fast it can proceed, what might happen any day now in Khan Al-Ahmar will determine the fate of Palestinian communities all over the West Bank. So far, Israeli preparations to demolish Khan Al-Ahmar continue unabated. High-level international statements have had no impact — not even the united voice, as expressed on 20 September, of the five current European members of the Council, joined by former member Italy and future members Belgium and Germany. They have my sincerest thanks and deep appreciation for those statements. Without their efforts, I doubt if Khan Al-Ahmar would still be standing today.

Yet, Israel has already answered their call by continuing with preparations for the demolition. Just a few days ago, the Minister of Defence described actions that are nothing short of a forcible transfer as "moving a small group of people within a several-kilometre radius". He called on the Council to stop its "flagrant interference" in Israel's plans, as if the forcible transfer of Khan Al-Ahmar, a strategic step in Israel's dismantling project, is somehow an internal and domestic matter. The members of the Security Council have spoken, and they have received Israel's answer. Action must now follow.

The President: I thank Mr. El-Ad for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We warmly congratulate the Plurinational State of Bolivia on acceding to the presidency of the Security Council and express our appreciation to you, Madam, for your skilled leadership of the Council.

I thank Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing to the Council today. I also extend our thanks to Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for his presentation, further exposing the dismal realities of the situation and sharing the concerns of civil society as they witness the distress of a people whose human rights are being so grossly violated and the destruction of the chances for peace and stability for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Against that backdrop and in view of the many regrettable developments since our last debate (see S/PV.8316), including escalating punitive measures against the Palestinian people and leadership, it is necessary to clarify certain matters.

Standing up for oneself and one's rights should never be equated with disrespect of anyone or misconstrued as a provocation. It is in fact an utmost expression of respect for one's rights and dignity, regardless of the consequences. When the American patriot Patrick Henry declared "give me liberty or give me death", he was not disrespecting or provoking anyone, but rather insisting on his right to live freely. It was considered an act of heroism, moral courage, and reverence for the liberty due to all humankind. The Charter of the United Nations has affirmed that right of all peoples to self-determination.

As Palestinians continue to be deprived of this right, it has been affirmed and called for in countless resolutions and declarations endorsed by a vast majority of States and peoples worldwide. Our right to self-determination and to live freely is a legitimate and inalienable right — a right we will never forsake; a right that we will not negotiate with anyone, nor will we ask permission to exercise it from anyone. It is the right of the Palestinian people to exercise it and they will exercise it alone, as has been the case with all peoples who have exercised the right to self-determination. Why, after all these years, considering humankind's progress and the understandings reached on the universal desire and right to freedom, why would the Palestinian people be expected to be any different? Why would they be expected to forever submit to foreign occupation and colonial domination?

Also affirmed in these Halls, year after year, is the fact that peace can never be realized in the absence of human rights and can never be built on the dehumanization of others. That has been proven repeatedly throughout history. We therefore agree with a statement made in the recent past by the United States

Permanent Representative, Mrs. Haley, before the Council on Foreign Relations, that

> "peace and security cannot be achieved in isolation from human rights ... Desperate people subject to humiliation and abuse will inevitably resort to violence."

It is true that such a situation can never be a path to peace, and a peace so imposed will never be viable. The situation of Palestine is no exception. Yet, despite the extreme human rights crisis being endured, our people continue, more often than not, to choose non-violence and peaceful protest.

What we are witnessing, however, are precisely such short-sighted, inhumane policies as Israel, the occupying Power, always chooses violence, brutalizing the Palestinian civilian population and colonizing its land, with zero consequence, supplemented by the recent United States decisions contravening United Nations resolutions, pressuring and vilifying the Palestinian leadership, and politicizing desperately needed humanitarian aid, including for more than 5.4 million Palestine refugees.

As part of an attempt to impose a so-called peace deal, such policies do nothing to help overcome the political impasse but rather harden it and cause more mistrust, which is already at an all-time high. Moreover, such policies prejudge and undermine just solutions to the core issues, prolonging the conflict and ensuring only more instability, insecurity and hardship.

We categorically reject these policies and the distorted, punitive, negative narratives accompanying them, which demean the legitimacy of Palestinian national aspirations and dismiss our rights, including those of our refugees. We also refute attempts to discredit the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which operates on the basis of a strong General Assembly mandate and has been consistently lauded by host countries and the international community — including the United States — for its exemplary humanitarian and development programmes and proven contribution to regional stability over the decades.

We refuse to accept such policies and rhetoric and respectfully stand up for our rights, as enshrined in universal covenants and countless United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council. We do so peacefully and unwaveringly, committed to all political, diplomatic, legal and civil means to secure our rights. We reject the pretexts used to continue denying those rights and exempting Israel from its violations. We cannot accept continued appeasement and hesitance to hold Israel accountable for its crimes, even as it flagrantly breaches all obligations as an occupying Power, threatening the very existence of our people in their homeland and even boasting of this in the most sinister of ways.

We cannot accept continued lip service to the peace process while Israel keeps proving how empty its commitment to negotiations and the two-State solution actually is, all the while entrenching its occupation, mocking the international community and still demanding privileged treatment. Israel should not be permitted to continue thwarting credible negotiations aimed at achieving just solutions to the final status issues — Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners — solutions which we all know to be vital to establishing lasting peace and security between the two peoples.

All who call for negotiations should make it clear that these must be based on the long-standing parameters and terms of reference set forth by the relevant resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. These are not preconditions; they are the foundation and guarantees of a just peace, which would inherently mean addressing the legitimate rights and concerns of both sides. Trying to accommodate illegitimate asks, claims and actions will never solve the problem; it will only create new ones, as we have seen over the 25 exhausting and futile years of the Oslo process.

As affirmed by the late former Secretary-General Kofi Annan in one of the last pieces he penned on behalf of The Elders, regarding the conflict:

> "[A] people deprived of liberty and dignity will never be pacified. Nor will they meekly accept a settlement imposed by outsiders that redraws borders and redefines sovereignty without popular consent. Any fresh approach to peacemaking must be welcome in principle ... Yet, if it does not address the root causes of the conflict, including historic dispossession, illegal settlement expansion, the status of Jerusalem as a shared capital and the rights of Palestinian refugees, the deal will be doomed to failure."

Those words ring alarmingly today. We have continually called on the international community to uphold its collective responsibility to bring an end to the Israeli occupation and this 70-year injustice. We do so again today, urging the Security Council to uphold its duties under the Charter of the United Nations and to act in conformity with its own resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), to address the root causes and tangibly contribute to a solution that will be just, comprehensive and lasting. We have also continually affirmed our commitment to the two-State solution as the path to peace, insisting, however, that it be a just peace — not one stripping our people of their land and rights. We do so again today.

How can those seeking to make peace condone, support or excuse the violations being perpetrated every single day against the Palestinian people by Israel and its destruction of the prospects for peace? They must not condone or excuse the savage killing of innocent civilians who have been cruelly denied protection for decades by an international community that has appeased and armed the occupation to the maximum with little remorse. While they may be seen as statistics by some, the Palestinian men, women and children who have been killed — including over 200 peaceful protesters, among them at least 45 children, since the Great March of Return in Gaza began, and including the mother of eight children, Aisha Mohammed Rabi, who was killed last week in the West Bank by Israeli settlers, as well as the tens of thousands who have been injured by the Israeli occupying forces — are not just numbers to us, but our sisters and brothers whose pain and losses we grieve for and weigh heavily on us, not least on our collective belief that justice and peace are possible.

They must not condone or excuse attempts to clear away people — human beings — like rubbish, with no regard for rights and dignity, or the demolition of their homes and lives. The forced transfer of people, as is happening in the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar and witnessed so many times before in occupied Palestine over the years, constitutes ethnic cleansing. This is not a mere decision by Israel's so-called judiciary, which has proven to serve and subsidize the occupation and where the chances for minimal justice for Palestinians are nil; this is a war crime.

They must not condone, excuse or in any way support the colonization of a people's ancestral lands, as is being committed flagrantly in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, where the Israeli Government not only persists with illegal settlement activities in all their manifestations — in flagrant breach of resolution 2334 (2016) and countless other resolutions — but openly declares its intent to annex our land, with officials, including the so-called Justice Minister, leading the charge in flat-out contempt of international law and the international community.

They must not condone or excuse the imprisonment of 2 million Palestinians in Gaza under the occupation's illegal blockade, by which Israel has caused humanitarian and socioeconomic devastation and exploited and deepened the Palestinian division, which regrettably remains a dark stain on our national history that has not been expunged despite many attempts at reconciliation, including the important effort of our brothers from Egypt, which we appreciate immensely.

Nor must they condone or excuse the imprisonment, detention and abuse of thousands of Palestinians, including hundreds of children, by the occupying Power, or its deceitful distortions of social welfare to the families of prisoners and martyrs as it persists in its attempts to undermine and weaken all of our institutions.

They must not condone or excuse religious extremism, incitement and hatred; pitting one religion against another threatening the sanctity of holy sites, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif; or the legislation of racism, discrimination and segregation, with racist laws that deem one people superior to another and grant them exclusive rights to the land, including to self-determination and return, while simultaneously denying those rights to the indigenous Palestinian people in a situation that can only be classified as apartheid.

The fact that an occupying Power should feel immune from accountability, even as it kills innocent civilians and violates all norms and principles of international law, only deepens cynicism about the potential for a just peace, especially among our young people, whose hopes are evaporating. The fact that the illegal occupation should last for more than a half-century, with no concrete action to bring it to an end, risks not only the future of our people and region, but also destroying the credibility of the international system and its laws, which the world has gone through wars and colossal human and material sacrifices to build, assert and defend.

What we demand — an end to the occupation and historic injustice — is not only a call for respect and

the realization of the Palestinian people' inalienable human rights and national aspirations, but also a call on the international community to respect and defend the universal principles and moral standards that it has itself developed and accepted as basic canons, all of which are in grave jeopardy at this critical moment.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I have a few comments to make on the circus that has been staged today in this Chamber. B'Tselem is an Israeli organization that is funded by the European Union and European Governments. It was invited to the Security Council today by Bolivia — a country with a terrible human rights record — to defame our strong democracy, but it has actually had the exact opposite effect. By inviting B'Tselem, Bolivia has in fact demonstrated the strength of Israel's vibrant democracy. I challenge everyone present to find a Palestinian or a Bolivian who could dare defame his Government in the Security Council. At best, he might be thrown in jail, but he would more likely end up dead.

I would like to read out an English translation of a short passage from an official Palestinian Authority textbook. It states,

> "There is an important place for heroes in every nation. They have sacrificed everything. They should be remembered forever, and we must be proud of them. A nation becomes even more proud as it gains more and more heroes. For if it were not for our heroes, we would not have a nation."

The next page of the textbook lists the number of those so-called heroes, like Dalal Mughrabi, the terrorist responsible for a massacre that killed 38 innocent people. For her killing, she is described in the book as "a crown of her nation".

That is from a textbook that Mahmoud Abbas has authorized for the current school year. This is Abbas's culture of hatred, right before the Council. It is the reason why Palestinian school children learn that it is better to kill a Jew than to keep a job. The Council will not hear that from Mr. Mansour or Mr. El-Ad, but Mahmoud Abbas is to blame. In his 13 years of rule, Abbas has done nothing but inspire that rampant culture of hatred. He is enabling an imminent war between Hamas and Israel. He preaches tolerance in English and terror in Arabic. If Council members are really interested in the truth, they should read translations of Abbas's Arabic speeches. He does not recognize Israel. He calls us racist. He is trying to bring us to court. He has led his people down a path of self-destruction and misery, stealing their chance at a good life. Far from being a peace partner, Mahmoud Abbas is the obstacle to peace. If members hope to see a better future for Palestinians and Israelis, they will join us in indicting Abbas.

We are on the brink of a major escalation in Gaza. Last night, two rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel. One hit Beersheba, and the other one was aimed at Tel Aviv. Hamas has set more than 8,000 acres of Israeli agricultural land on fire. It has launched at least 300 rockets into Israel this year alone. It sends thousands of rioters to commit violence on our southern border almost every day. It steals foreign-aid funding to expand its weapons arsenal and uses the cement intended for schools and hospitals to construct terror tunnels. Israel has just discovered and destroyed the fifteenth terror tunnel found since October of last year.

Israel continues to send a strong message to Hamas that nothing will justify terror and that it will pay a heavy price for attacking Israel. But we have not forgotten about Abbas. Abbas is taking active measures to radicalize the people of Gaza and prolong their suffering. For his own on cynical political purposes, Abbas is pushing Israel and Hamas towards a war that could begin any day. For months, Abbas has withheld critical international funding for the people of Gaza.

We heard Mr. Mladenov. Today, more than 40,000 Palestinian workers in Gaza do not receive a paycheque from Abbas and half of them live below the poverty line. The unemployment rate is 53 per cent. Families live with little electricity or fuel and even less clean water. When an Arab country offered $60 million to help to pay for electricity in Gaza, Abbas said no. He even threatened to make it worse for the people of Gaza if countries ignored those orders and delivered funds. Abbas has now refused help from Israel, the United States and even the United Nations. He exploits the dire situation in Gaza in order to stay in power.

In Judea and Samaria, Abbas is guilty of a different type of exploitation — the infamous "pay to slay" policy, which remains the crown jewel of Abbas's incitement campaign. In the Palestinian Authority's 2018 budget, Abbas allocated $355 million towards the "pay to slay" policy. That is 7 per cent of the total budget of the

Palestinian Authority — 7 per cent. Let me put that into perspective — 7 per cent of the budget of Bolivia last year was more than $1 billion; 7 per cent of the budget of Sweden was $19 billion; and 7 per cent of the budget of the Netherlands was $24 billion. Imagine all that money spent to encourage the killing of Jews.

That criminal policy is killing people. Ten days ago, it did. It was just the beginning of another ordinary workweek. Kim Levenegrond Yehezkel and Ziv Hagbi entered their offices as usual, like every Sunday in Israel. They worked in the Barkan industrial zone, a complex of factories in which thousands of Israelis and Palestinians work side by side. Kim was 28 years old. She was a mother with a one-year-old baby. Ziv was 35 and a father of three. The ordinary workweek quickly turned into a massacre. A Palestinian co-worker of Kim and Ziv — someone they knew — turned into a terrorist that day. He used his work permit to enter the factory as he would any other day. But this time he had a rifle hidden in his bag. He made it through the security checkpoint and entered the room where Kim and Ziv sat in their office. Then he had them tied up and he shot them in cold blood.

Just like that, four children lost a parent, two spouses lost their partners and that very society suffered yet another wound from terrorism. The killer is still at large but he cannot hide forever. We will catch him, and he will pay for his crime. But Abbas will pay too. Abbas will pay him. He will pay a total of $3 million to that animal during his lifetime in prison. That is the legacy of Abbas — to slaughter innocent Israelis and be rewarded for life. The same $355 million Abbas pays to terrorists is also more than 45 per cent of the foreign aid that the Palestinians will receive in 2018. That means that nearly half of every dollar that everyone gives to the Palestinian people to build roads and schools is put into the pockets of those who murder Jews. Therefore, if they do not pull their funding, they are complicit in the "pay to slay" policy. Earlier this year, the United States and Israel passed legislation to freeze payments to the Palestinian Authority until it ends its "pay to slay" programme. Australia has also cut aid funding to the Palestinians, as it feared they were financing terror. In response, Abbas ensured that he would continue those payments even if "we had only a single penny left".

Abbas's priority is clear. His aim is to incite, so ours must be to indict. If there were no culture of hate, no incitement, no payments to terrorists and no glorification of murder, just imagine where Israel and the Palestinians would be today. If there was a Palestinian leader who actually cared about his people, perhaps we would have a solution to the conflict. Let me remind the members of the Council of some simple logic. They cannot expect different results when they do not change the equation. If they really want to change the reality for Palestinians and Israelis, they must change the equation. Remove the source of the culture of hate and textbook terrorism. When that source is removed, when Abbas is gone, only then will we see a brighter future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In my capacity as representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, I am not at this time going to respond to the unfounded accusations of the representative of Israel.

In my capacity as President of the Security Council, I now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. Special Coordinator Mladenov's briefing was informative and it is appreciated. Mr. El-Ad's briefing, by contrast, was the sort of distorted and one-sided account that is provided all too often at the United Nations when it comes to Israel and the Palestinian issue. It is why I have so often attempted to bring some diversity to our discussions of the challenges facing the Middle East. Rather than repeating the same tired points at this monthly meeting, I will take the opportunity to focus on a matter of great significance that is taking place today in the Middle East — a matter that has received far less attention than it deserves. I urge my colleagues to listen, as their countries might unknowingly be affected by it.

First, by way of a little background, in less than two weeks, on 30 October, Iran will celebrate Student Basij Day. What does Basij Day celebrate? It is the day on which, during the Iran-Iraq war, a 13-year-old boy strapped a live grenade to his body and leapt under an oncoming Iraqi tank. His name was Mohammad Hossein Fahmideh. Child soldiers like Hossein were a horrifying feature of the Iran-Iraq war. Children were sent into battle with a plastic key to paradise hung around their necks. They were untrained and considered expendable. In wars between trained adult military forces, the numbers of the wounded typically outnumber the dead. But the child soldiers of Iran were used as cannon fodder and as a human minesweeper. The dead far outnumbered the wounded. According to the Iranians themselves, 36,000 school-age children

were killed and just under 3,000 were wounded in the Iran-Iraq war.

So why does that history matter today? Some in the international community still labour under the misimpression that the Iranian regime might be a responsible international actor or might abide by the laws of a civilized society. Some think that Tehran might care more about a better life for the people of Iran than about the forcible spread of the regime's power and influence. Many things about the Iranian regime contradict that premise. One of the most glaring contradictions is the continued use of children to fight and die in Iranian aggression abroad. The Government in Tehran long ago turned Mohammad Hossein Fahmideh's death into a propaganda tool to recruit and train children for war. It continues to use that memory of its past barbarism to promote more barbarism. The use of child soldiers is a moral outrage that every civilized nation rejects, while Iran celebrates it.

The Basij Resistance Force is a paramilitary force operating under Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In addition to cracking down on dissidents and enforcing internal security in Iran, the Basij indoctrinate schoolchildren and provide combat training to children as young as 12 years old. Those children are then coerced into fighting abroad for the IRGC. Since at least early 2015, the Iranian regime has used the Basij to recruit and train Iranian children to fight in Syria in support of the brutal Al-Assad regime. The Basij also targets Afghan immigrants in Iran — some as young as 14 years old — to fight in Syria.

The United States has followed the money that funds the recruitment, training and coerced deployment of child soldiers in Iran. Earlier this week, we identified the sources of the Basij funding and took action to cut them off from the global economy and financial system. Two days ago, the United States Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control imposed sanctions on a network of 20 Iranian corporations and financial institutions that provide funding for the Basij Resistance Force. That network is deeply entrenched in the Iranian economy. It is comprised of multibillion-dollar business interests that operate in Iran's automotive, mining, metals and banking industries. The network uses shell companies to hide the ownership of those interests. Many of the companies do substantial international business across the Middle East and Europe.

The United States action targets banks, investment firms and subsidiary mining and manufacturing companies. It includes the largest tractor manufacturing company in the Middle East and North Africa. It also includes Iran's largest steel producer, which funnels millions of dollars each year to the Basij and its financial network. Our Treasury Department has done impressive forensic accounting to uncover the hidden and overlapping networks of businesses and financial institutions that fund the work of the Basij forces.

For anyone who cares to look, that is a perfect example of what is fuelling the outrage of the Iranian people today. Iran's economy is increasingly devoted to funding Iranian repression at home and aggression abroad. In this case, Iranian big business and finance are funding the war crime of using child soldiers. That is crony terrorism. The Iranian people are rightly disgusted with it and they are taking to the streets to protest. To add insult to injury, the Basij use the very money that they have stolen from the people to forcibly shut down the protests and arrest the protesters.

The designations announced by the United States Treasury Department extend beyond property or interests in the United States or in the possession of United States persons. Anyone who engages in transactions with those designated entities could themselves be designated and any foreign financial institution that knowingly engages in transactions with those entities could themselves be subject to United States sanctions. The sanctions that the United States is levelling against Iran are broad and deep, and for good reason. Any company or individual that does business with that Iranian network is complicit in sending children to die on the battlefields of Syria and elsewhere.

The United States will do all that it can to reverse the flow of international funds into the coffers of the Iranian regime. I thank everyone for listening today and for their attention to this human rights crisis that is occurring in the heart of the Middle East. I urge my colleagues to join with the United States in helping to the protect Iranian children from the Government that is supposed to protect them.

Mr. Ashikbayev (Kazakhstan): We thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his detailed and objective update on the situation in the Middle East. Let me focus on some developments in the Middle East that have caused the

overall turmoil, not only in the region but also beyond, with heightened and grave consequences for global insecurity. These violent conflicts are also having an increasingly serious impact on countries in Africa, South, Central and South-East Asia and other regions.

Kazakhstan's position on the Middle East peace process is very clear and remains unchanged. We support the two-State solution and call for the early resumption of negotiations, especially in the bilateral format and without preconditions. That should be in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant Security Council resolutions and other mechanisms and initiatives, such as the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid principles and the land-for-peace formula.

We support the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of a free, sovereign and independent State within the international borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is necessary to begin direct talks to reach agreement on pending issues by giving them a so-called final status through the signing of a basic treaty that provides security to both Israel and Palestine.

Turning to Gaza, we are alarmed to see increased Palestinian casualties. We reiterate that the Israeli security forces must calibrate the use of force, which must be employed only as a last resort. We also underscore our call on Palestinians to avoid provocations. All the incidents in Gaza since March must be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. We reiterate our call for all sides to refrain from any act that could lead to further casualties and, in particular, any measures that could place civilians in harm's way. Kazakhstan believes that Gaza remains an integral part of the two-State solution, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. We hope that relieving the humanitarian pressure in Gaza will reduce tensions and the threat of escalation. Furthermore, we call on the Palestinian Authority and Hamas to seriously engage with Egypt on reconciliation and move forward with implementing the Cairo agreement of 12 October 2017.

We are concerned about the temporary withdrawal of international staff from Gaza, following a series of worrying security incidents affecting its personnel, who were harassed and prevented from carrying out their duties. The challenging financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is a cause for concern, in particular the emergency appeal for the occupied Palestinian territory. We endorse the Agency's calls on the local authorities in Gaza to provide effective protection to its personnel and facilities.

Regarding Syria, Kazakhstan believes that the Astana process has great potential for directing intra-Syrian talks towards long-term peace and for supporting the Geneva process. We call on the International Syria Support Group and other countries to help to implement the measures stipulated by the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), the Vienna statements and other texts.

With regard to Lebanon, with the parliamentary elections held successfully in May, we hope that the new Government can be formed soon with the consolidation of the Constitution through a democratic process. We realize that both of those are contingent on developments in neighbouring Syria. I am pleased to inform the Council that Kazakhstan's support to United Nations peacekeeping operations is being expanded by co-deploying, by the end of October, a well-trained and highly qualified Kazakh contingent to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in partnership with India. In addition, competent individual officers will also be sent to Lebanon and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

We congratulate Iraq on the election of its new President, Mr. Barham Salih, and the appointment of the new Prime Minister-designate, Mr. Adel Abdul Mahdi. That will result in the next Government being formed soon to help to bring about stability and peaceful coexistence among the population and its minorities.

Turning to Yemen, we call for broad-based, inclusive national dialogue in order to end hostilities, which in turn will provide an opportunity to revive the economy, resolve the humanitarian crisis and restore public services. Only a political settlement will mitigate the humanitarian and security challenges.

In conclusion, the region today and the entire world are experiencing an uneasy confrontation among countries, thus adding to mutual distrust and tension. Peace and security, a world without terrorism and nuclear weapons, sustainable development and human rights for all are also noble goals for the Middle East, which cannot be achieved without the joint efforts of the international community.

Just over a week ago, Astana was host to the sixth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Once again leaders of different religious denominations, including the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar of Egypt, the Chief Sephardic and Ashkenazi Rabbis of Israel, leaders of Shi'a Islam, Christianity and Buddhism — all in all more than 80 delegations from 46 countries around the world — stressed the importance of international cooperation to overcome intolerance, discrimination, exclusion, tensions and conflicts based on ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural differences.

Kazakhstan is deeply committed to joining the multilateral efforts to secure stability in this troubled region which, at the same time, holds great promise when peace will prevail.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and for his efforts in actively pushing forward the de-escalation of tension and the easing of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. I listened carefully to the statements made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel, as well as by Mr. Hagai El-Ad.

The current Palestinian-Israeli situation is very fragile and tense, with frequent violent confrontations and ongoing risks of escalation. The Palestinian Great March of Return demonstration in the Gaza Strip has been going on since March, with Palestinian civilian casualties continuously on the rise. Settlement activities continue on the West Bank of the Jordan River and in Jerusalem and the demolition of Palestinian houses is still taking place. That seriously challenges the prospects for the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 border. The violent conflict and political confrontations have further exacerbated the mistrust between the two sides, with more restraining factors for the relaunch of the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks.

The grim humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is not conducive to regional stability and the Middle East peace process. The party in question should fully lift its Gaza blockade at an early date. The use of force and violence for violence are not conducive to the settlement of the issue. The relevant parties should proceed from the goal of the overall security and peaceful coexistence of the peoples in the region, exercise restraint and avoid escalation. The international community should fully implement the General Assembly resolutions concerning the protection of Palestinian civilians in order to ease the current situation in Gaza.

Faced with the current situation, the international community should have an enhanced sense of urgency. The Security Council should strengthen its unity in a common effort to return the Palestine question to the track of a negotiated solution. First, the Council should push for but not weaken the two-State solution. The two-State solution is the right way to settle the Palestine issue. The international community should implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, the land-for-peace principle, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map to Mideast peace and, on that basis, strengthen political and diplomatic efforts. Efforts should be made to abandon any and all measures that weaken the prospect of the two-State solution, implement resolution 2334 (2016), stop all settlement activities in the occupied territories, and adopt measures to prevent violence against civilians.

Secondly, the Council should be united and cooperate to push for an early end to the stalemate of the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks. Parties with significant influence on the Middle East peace process should play a constructive role, promote the mutual confidence of the two sides, start a new round of efforts to promote peace and try new mechanisms of good offices. All parties should work to break away from the vicious cycle of escalating confrontation between Palestine and Israel and accelerate the internal Palestinian reconciliation process.

Thirdly, the Council should properly address the final status of Jerusalem. That is a complex and sensitive issue and has a bearing on the future of the two-State solution and regional peace and stability. In dealing with related issues, all parties should be prudent and avoid imposing unilateral solutions that lead to renewed confrontation. All parties should uphold the principles of respect for their diverse history, adherence to fairness and justice, implementation of the international consensus and the realization of peaceful coexistence. On the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international consensus and through final-status negotiations, they should reach a settlement that takes the interests of all parties into account.

China resolutely supports the Palestinian people in establishing a Palestinian State that enjoys full sovereignty and independence on the basis of the 1967 border, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We support

the greater integration of Palestine into the international community, with a view to its active participation in the affairs of the United Nations. China will continue to play a constructive role in taking the Middle East peace process forward.

For many years, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has played an important role in providing health care, education and other basic services to the 5.3 million Palestinian refugees. The international community should provide UNRWA with more adequate, predictable and sustainable funding. We appreciate those who made additional contributions to UNRWA and appeal to all to continue to strengthen their support to UNRWA and to countries receiving Palestinian refugees. Over the past 30 years, China has made annual contributions to UNRWA. This year, we increased our contribution to UNRWA in view of its urgent needs. China will continue to do what it can to provide assistance to UNRWA so that it may implement its mandate.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): I would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his most useful and comprehensive briefing on the latest developments concerning the Middle East and Palestine.

It is clear that provocative actions continue to fuel tensions on the ground. That inevitably pushed the parties to another cycle of confrontation and violence. While we condemn all attacks and deeply regret the loss of any innocent civilian lives, we would call upon the parties to exercise maximum restraint. The region is already on the edge. Every effort must be made to avoid further escalation. We support any and all efforts to diffuse tension. In that context, we appreciate what the United Nations and Egypt are doing to help to restore calm and facilitate a return to the 2014 ceasefire arrangements.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be of serious concern and the growing sense of frustration and despair among the Palestinians is completely understandable. Meeting the critical needs of the Palestinians living in Gaza remains a daunting challenge and addressing the huge funding gap must continue to be a matter of the utmost priority. That needs much greater attention and mobilization by the international community, even though it was a matter of discussion at a number of meetings held on the margins of the General Assembly last month. These included the meetings of the Middle East Quartet and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. We share the concerns expressed by the Middle East Quartet and note its support for the efforts of the United Nations to prevent further escalation, empower the legitimate Palestinian authorities in Gaza and address all humanitarian needs.

We also note the outcome of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the priority areas it identified to address the critical situation affecting the Palestinian economy and the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We would strongly agree with the support expressed for the Palestinian Authority to reinstate its governance in Gaza, in order to reunite Palestine under one authority. We believe that progress in the Egyptian-led reconciliation is indeed the key, and the Palestinian parties should be urged to cooperate for the sake of their own people, who have been suffering for far too long.

Ethiopia's position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has always been consistent and clear. As much as we support the right of Israel to exist in peace and security, we also support the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of Palestine to exist as a free and independent State.

Accordingly, we fully support the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security. Indeed, this is the only viable option to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We believe that this is not only in the best interest of both Israel and Palestine but that it will also significantly advance peace and security in the Middle East.

Peace in the Middle East and Palestine, however, continues to elude us. It is very clear that we need to reinvigorate efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, lasting and just solution to the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian dispute on the basis of the two-State formula. In other words, facilitating the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties is vital. It is, we believe, incumbent upon the Council to fully support such efforts for the sake of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians and peace in the broader Middle Eastern region.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Madam President, we thank you for having convened this meeting and Mr. Nickolay Mladenov and Mr. Hagai El-Ad for their important briefings.

Peru notes with deep concern the continued violence between Israelis and Palestinians. We cannot but deplore the deaths and injuries and the worsening of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, with no solution to the prolonged conflict in sight. We continue to condemn the disproportionate use of force by Israel and the indiscriminate actions against civilians carried out by Hamas. International law, international humanitarian law and human rights are being flagrantly ignored.

We must continue to reject hate speech, incitement to violence, recourse to terrorism, laws promoting discrimination and anti-Semitism, all of this within a particularly unstable regional context. The settlements, demolitions and evictions in occupied Palestinian territory openly defy international law and specific resolutions of the Council, including resolution 2334 (2016), and they jeopardize the territorial integrity of the Palestinian State and hence undermine the possibility of achieving a political solution to the conflict.

We note with particular alarm the legal and humanitarian consequences of the demolition of a group of structures and the eviction of a Bedouin community in Khan Al-Ahmar. We believe that the Israeli authorities must ensure that this demolition is halted, in accordance with international law. We are also alarmed about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Poverty, injustice and marginalization are a breeding ground for radicalization and violent extremism.

We believe that the provision of goods and basic services, as well as overcoming the isolation of millions of Palestinians, must be priority issues for the international community. In that regard, we commend the implementation of development projects in Gaza that are being promoted by the United Nations, with international support. We stress how important it is that the crossing points of Kerem Shalom and Rafah remain open, with adequate security, and that the fishing zone on the Gaza coast not be reduced, as this would have humanitarian consequences.

We wish to underscore the generous contributions announced by various States to provide predictable and sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and also to alleviate the serious energy crisis affecting the people of Gaza. We note, however, that this entity continues to face a critical financial situation and that it is therefore vital to continue mobilizing the support of the international community. We also deplore the recent announcements about the possible closure of its offices in East Jerusalem, despite the legal framework regulating its functioning in accordance with resolutions adopted by the United Nations and other instruments of international law.

Peru continues to encourage the parties to resume direct negotiations with a view to achieving the only viable solution to the conflict: two States living securely within mutually recognized borders and with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

The United Nations and the Council in particular are called upon to provide such a solution and to protect civilians affected by the conflict. In this regard, we wish to conclude by expressing our recognition of and support for the important diplomatic work done by Mr. Mladenov and to thank him for periodically reminding us, in a clear and balanced way, of our responsibilities as an international community.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would first like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing on the most recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, which remind us of the gravity of the situation there. We commend his endeavours and reiterate our full support for his efforts to ease tensions and avoid a confrontation. We would like also to thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem. We commend him for his courage in participating in this meeting to discuss the violations by the Israeli occupation authorities of the human rights of Palestinians, who are living in very difficult economic and social conditions because of these practices.

We are meeting today a few weeks after the conclusion of the general debate of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session, whose echo continues to resound. The strong support given to the Palestinian people by Heads of State and Government in their statements sent a clear message about the way in which Member States have addressed the Palestinian question for the past seven decades, namely, that Israel, the occupying Power, must be compelled to stop its violations of the most basic rules of international law and that it must implement its legal obligations as stipulated by international conventions and treaties, notably the Charter of the United Nations, which we have all adopted as our guiding light and which embodies our belief in basic human rights, the dignity

and worth of the individual and the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

Unfortunately, these rights remain but a dream for our brothers and sisters in Palestine. The echo of this message did not simply stop at the General Assembly but spread to many other meetings held during the high-level week, as well as the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee on Palestine and the ministerial meeting of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Those two meetings reaffirmed the priority that a large number of States give to these issues with a view to alleviating the Palestinian people's suffering as a result of the crises they are facing, especially on the humanitarian and economic fronts. Those States are also trying to maintain the dignity of Palestine's 5 million refugees and not to disappoint the more than 500,000 male and female students among those refugees. Based on its commitment to supporting UNRWA so that it can continue to offer its vital services to refugees, last month Kuwait decided to donate an additional $42 million to the UNRWA budget.

Unfortunately, despite the resonance of these messages, they have produced no results, because the Israeli occupying forces have continued their grievous systemic violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Israeli occupation forces have continued to use excessive force against Palestinian civilians taking part in the Great March of Return, which was a peaceful demonstration. As we heard earlier from Mr. Mladenov, those forces have continued to use live ammunition against demonstrators, raising the number of those killed to more than 205 and of the injured to more than 20,000. In the past two weeks alone, we have witnessed the deaths of 10 Palestinian martyrs, including three children, and 882 Palestinians have been injured. And Friday, 28 September, saw the highest number of casualties in a single day since May, when seven martyrs were killed.

This killing and terror spree did not simply stop there. Attacks have continued to dominate the stage in the occupied territories. Aisha Al-Rabi, a mother of eight, died a martyr from a head injury received during an attack by settlers who threw rocks at the car that her husband was driving as they were returning home from a family visit in Hebron. Before she was killed, she had been preparing for the forthcoming wedding of her daughter Salam. The Council no doubt agrees with me on the need to condemn this heinous crime. These actions, which constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, are the responsibility of the Israeli occupation authorities alone. In that regard, we join our voice to that of Special Coordinator Mladenov in demanding that those who killed this Palestinian mother be quickly brought to trial.

We also want to note the impending danger of the implementation of the unjust decision to raze the town of Khan Al-Ahmar and forcibly move its Bedouin residents away from the demolition site as bulldozers and demolition machines, accompanied by large numbers of Israeli troops, drew nearer. These events resulted in injuries to many of the community residents and those who stood in solidarity with them, including an Israeli citizen, as they were severely beaten while defending their homes and property. We reiterate our rejection of Israel's aggressive and systematic policies targeting unarmed Palestinians, which are all part of an illegal plan to annex these lands and impose a policy of fait accompli that aims to partition the West Bank, undermine its geographic continuity, negatively affect the possibility of a two-State solution and maintain the foundations for a racist regime against the Palestinian people.

We also strongly condemn the Israeli Government's recent endorsement of a decision to build a new Jewish settlement neighbourhood in the city of Hebron, where more than 200,000 Palestinians live, south of occupied Jerusalem, reportedly the first such endorsement in Hebron since 2002. We can add that to the record of unjust Israeli settlement decisions that clearly violate Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which among other things confirms that Israeli settlement activity constitutes a clear violation of international law and is an obstacle to peace. It also states that Israel should immediately and completely end all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and also affirms that the international community will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including those pertaining to Jerusalem, except those changes that are agreed to by the two parties through negotiations.

Arrests, the demolition of homes, the destruction of property, the unprecedented expansion in the construction of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the

targeting of civilians and the siege of the Gaza Strip, which has gone on for nearly 12 years, have all become part of the Palestinian people's daily routine for years. Nevertheless, the Security Council unfortunately remains incapable of compelling the occupying Power to implement its resolutions, thus giving Israel a green light to continue its practices and entrench its occupation and thereby undermining any chance for a genuine peace that would guarantee the Palestinian people their legitimate rights, including their right to independence, sovereignty and a dignified and free life, the most basic of human rights.

Many decades have gone by since the Palestinian question was put on the United Nations agenda. It is constantly being discussed, and many resolutions have been adopted about it. However, the question remains unanswered, and no solutions have been found. The resolutions have not been implemented because of the obstinacy of Israel, the occupying State, and because of its explicit and blatant refusal to implement resolutions of international legitimacy and its deliberately mocking disregard of those resolutions. The time has come to make sure that the members of the Security Council give this issue, like others, its fair share of attention, as Israel continues its attacks and acts of aggression, which could be considered the inevitable result of the absence of any serious call from the Security Council to Israel to end that continued aggression and to fulfil its obligations as the occupying Power, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize the strategic option, which is to arrive at a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by all Arab States at the 2002 Beirut summit. This solution would be based on Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories to the borders of 4 June 1967, and it includes dealing with all final status issues in a way that can enable the Palestinian people to enjoy all of their legitimate political rights, including the right to self-determination and to establish an independent State on their territory with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Mladenov and Mr. El-Ad for their informative briefings.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be a complex one requiring a significant collective effort, first and foremost by the United Nations and its Security Council, which is the main guarantor of the international legal architecture.

In our view, strict adherence to international law and to the spirit and letter of the Charter of the United Nations constitutes a firm foundation for developing a formula for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In that regard, we are seriously concerned about the aggressive re-examination of previously reached agreements, including some that have been enshrined in Security Council resolutions. We believe that any ideas and proposals in this area should be based on relevant internationally accepted principles and previously approved resolutions of the Security Council, along with the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid principles. Any plans or agreements, whatever they are called, should be subordinate to the main goal of stabilizing the situation in the region by arriving at a just, long-term settlement of the Palestinian question as a key item on the Middle East agenda.

We see that the Palestinian-Israeli situation is steadily deteriorating. The lack of progress in the political process has created a vacuum that is being filled with violence, unilateral measures and provocative rhetoric. We are not even supposed to mention the fact that all the long-standing problems, including settlement activity, are still a long way from being solved. The gulf of misunderstanding and mistrust is widening, undermining the prospects for a resumption of negotiations.

We cannot help feeling alarmed by the escalating tension around Gaza, the missiles launched at Israeli settlements and the answering air strikes. We condemn any displays of terror and urge all the parties to refrain from confrontational attitudes. We appreciate the efforts undertaken in accordance with United Nations policies by Special Coordinator Mladenov and various regional players to correct the current trends and help Gazan residents. Needless to say, that assistance should be carried out in close coordination with the legitimate Palestinian authorities under President Abbas, and should be integrated into the task of restoring Palestinian unity.

We note the need for sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose activities for decades

have had an important stabilizing effect in relieving the burden of Palestinian refugees in Gaza and countries of the Middle East. We want to point out that the issue of refugees should be the subject of a bilateral Palestinian-Israeli dialogue, not the object of arbitrary decisions.

In the current circumstances, we urgently need to mobilize efforts to revive the political process between the Palestinians and the Israelis on the international legal basis that we are all familiar with, which assumes the implementation of a two-State solution as a result of direct negotiations. Unilateral steps are not capable of achieving a just and lasting peace designed to realize Palestinians' national aspirations and strengthen Israel's security. That is why we have kept our proposal for holding a summit in Russia between the leaders of Palestine and Israel on the table, with a view to enabling us to end an extraordinarily dangerous and prolonged impasse in the efforts to reach a Palestinian-Israeli settlement. Russia will continue to maintain its principled position, supporting and developing relations with all the parties in the framework of a positive agenda. We support the Middle East Quartet's active resumption of its work of international mediators, which is still a unique mediation format approved by Security Council resolutions.

Progress in the business of resolving the acute crises in the Middle East and North Africa can be made only in a framework of broad cooperation and respect for our obligations under international law. The joint efforts of the country-guarantors of the Astana process have proved in practice that developing a common vision for a settlement in Syria is possible despite our differences. We are open to collaborating with anyone who is willing to join this process in a constructive spirit. We firmly believe that together we can do a great deal to end the bloodshed in Yemen, stabilize Libya, support normalization in Iraq and unblock other crises. The countries of the region have a rich cultural, human and natural potential from which they can develop and even flourish, but it is a potential that will be fully realized only when interference in the region's internal affairs comes to an end.

The Russian Federation supports the formulation of a positive and unifying agenda on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, for the Security Council and the entire international community. We believe that the Council's meeting during our presidency on a comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa (see S/PV.8293) made an important contribution to the joint analysis of the genesis of the conflicts in the region and the quest for collective tools to resolve them.

The key to our collective work in the region should be creating conditions conducive to strengthening a general atmosphere of trust. This is crucial to the relations between the Arab States, Israel and Iran. We would like to remind the Council that in its resolution 598 (1987), the Security Council instructed the Secretary-General to work with the parties in the region on measures for enhancing its security and stability. This is a complicated issue, but we have to begin working on it, and we are ready to provide every possible assistance for it through our contacts with our regional partners.

The ultimate goal should be establishing a regional security architecture that is genuinely inclusive and is intended to involve every State in that part of the world. Our concept of strengthening security in the Persian Gulf under international guarantees, which we could begin to implement through a conference in which the States of the subregion participate, is still relevant, and in future could be expanded to other Middle Eastern countries. In all these and other aspects, Russia is ready to work with interested partners on an open, impartial basis.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to start by thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and for his tireless efforts. The United Nations and its agencies deserve to be commended for the work that they are doing on the ground every day in a very challenging environment. We stand fully behind their efforts and their continued close consultations with the parties. I thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad for being here today and for sharing his honest assessment and valuable perspectives, and more importantly for the integrity and bravery of B'Tselem and many other civil-society organizations in both Israel and Palestine. We commend him for his conscience and encourage him to speak up as an Israeli citizen. Personal insults have no place in this Chamber.

We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later today.

Sweden has a long-standing engagement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a steadfast friendship with the peoples of both Israel and Palestine. As a member of the Security Council, we have consistently

based our position on international law, including international human rights and international humanitarian law. While the proliferation of new and re-emerging crises in the Middle East requires our attention, we must maintain our active commitment to resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict. The situation is increasingly urgent as new generations grow up in a reality marred by conflict. The shared vision of the international community remains unchanged. It consists of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the future capital of those two States and the home of three world religions. We must now return to a meaningful and inclusive peace process, ending the occupation and resolving all final status issues. If we are to achieve a just and sustainable peace, it is critical to ensure that any future peace plan is based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements. Final status issues can be taken off the table only when they have been resolved through negotiations between the parties.

The continued rapid deterioration of the situation on the ground is destroying hopes for peace. A two-State solution is regrettably becoming more distant by the day. Israelis and Palestinians alike have an urgent responsibility to reverse those trends. We are deeply concerned about the continuing rapid settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and that includes the decision by the Israeli authorities to advance plans for new settlement units in the city of Hebron. We are also deeply concerned about the demolition of homes, including the imminent threat of demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar and the forcible displacement of its inhabitants, a majority of whom are children. The village is located in Area E-1, a location of strategic interest for preserving the contiguity of a Palestinian State. Settlements are illegal under international law, and the evictions and demolitions of homes that enable the policy to continue seriously threaten the prospects for peace. We strongly condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terrorism. The use of disproportionate, lethal violence in recent days and weeks is a tragedy. The crimes must be investigated and those responsible must be held accountable.

The peace process cannot merely be about ending the occupation and the conflict. It must also be about building peaceful and inclusive societies. A vibrant civil society, particularly with the meaningful inclusion of women and young people, is critical to sustainable peace. The shrinking space for civil society and the possibilities for promoting human rights are a source of great concern on both sides. On the Palestinian side, laws are used to curtail freedom of expression, and on the Israeli side, representatives of civil-society organizations are delegitimized, creating obstacles for them in carrying out their important work. We call on both the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships to support, respect and allow members of civil society to operate and express their views freely.

In the so-called post-Oslo generation, few on either side have any hope that peace is still possible. We must show these young people that there is an alternative to conflict, violence and a constantly deteriorating situation. And the voices of young Israelis and Palestinians must be heard, in line with resolution 2419 (2018). Both Israel and Palestine have been vocal advocates for the full implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and the meaningful inclusion and engagement of women in the peace process. We remain committed to supporting such efforts in every way we can.

Mr. Mladenov has rightly put the Council on high alert today. Gaza is on the verge of collapse. The situation remains untenable and increasingly desperate. Millions of people are caught between Hamas and other militant groups on the one hand, and the Israeli policy of closure on the other. The people of Gaza must not pay the price for that long-standing crisis. We continue to witness tragic events leading to regrettable loss of life. All the parties must exercise maximum restraint, avoid confrontation and take immediate steps to de-escalate. We must also step up efforts to avoid a humanitarian disaster. There is an urgent need for humanitarian interventions with a quick, direct and immediate impact on the daily lives of the people in need. All actors have a responsibility in that regard.

There is an urgent need to lift the restrictions, secure full and sustained access and movement to and from Gaza and ensure unimpeded access for all humanitarian actors, while maintaining respect for the legitimate security concerns of Israel, Palestine and Egypt. The efforts to achieve the full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza must be redoubled. We support the Egyptian-led efforts to achieve reconciliation and call on all Palestinian factions to revitalize genuine attempts to that end. Only reconciliation will lead to a unified

Palestinian leadership and a reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by the General Assembly and mandated to provide assistance and protection to Palestinian refugees across the region until a negotiated, lasting and just solution to that issue was reached. UNRWA not only delivers critical services and education but plays a crucial role in ensuring stability in a region seriously affected by conflict, terrorism and turmoil. During the high-level week of the General Assembly, Sweden, together with Jordan, Turkey, Japan, Germany and the European Union, hosted a ministerial meeting to mobilize political and financial support to UNRWA. Together we managed to mobilize $122 million, significantly reducing UNRWA's deficit and enabling the Agency's schools to remain open throughout 2018. Having now overcome the most immediate crisis, we must shift our focus to the coming year. Much work remains to be done to secure funding for 2019. We must maintain the recent positive momentum and end the Agency's perpetual crisis mode by finding solutions for more predictable and sustainable funding. UNRWA is not part of the problem, it is part of the solution.

In conclusion, we cannot allow the viability of a two-State solution to move beyond our reach. We must act, or we risk moving rapidly not only towards perpetual occupation but towards a one-State reality. That should not be in anyone's interest. The Council, and every one of its members, has a responsibility. Our faith in a negotiated, just and fair two-State solution led us to recognize the State of Palestine in 2014. It is not too late to resolve this conflict. We must do everything in our power to make sure that the hope of two States is kept alive and that the vision of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East is realized. We owe it to every young Israeli and Palestinian. They deserve no less from us.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing and his commitment day in and day out, and to renew France's support for him. I would also like to commend Bolivia's initiative in inviting Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of the Israeli non-governmental organization B'Tselem, who has been doing remarkable work under difficult conditions. It is an ongoing policy of France to support opening the work of the Security Council to the voices of civil society, which must be heard in the context of addressing the crises on our agenda.

Turning to the situation on the ground, every passing day confirms the tragic threefold observation that we regularly make before the Council. First, the false status quo before us masks a daily deterioration of the situation that is linked in particular to the settlement policy. Secondly, that situation has the potential to degenerate into open crisis at any moment, as we have been seeing in Gaza for months, and it also produces its daily share of violence, including an incident that recently claimed the lives of two Israelis and that we condemned. Thirdly, when the prospects for peace on the ground diminish, they do the same in people's minds and conversations, feeding into a particularly dangerous vicious cycle. Last month was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Oslo Accords, and according to opinion surveys, almost three quarters of Palestinians now believe that their situation has worsened since the Accords were signed. Today, only a small percentage of Palestinians and Israelis still believe in the possibility of a two-State solution. Generation by generation, Palestinians and Israelis are losing hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which opens the door to the worst possibility, the despair that is our common enemy. That is why it is so important for the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to preserve a pluralistic and open space within their respective societies. The democratic future of those societies depends on that and on the possibility of dialogue between them.

Any negotiations must take place within the framework that I have just outlined, which is based on international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980), on Jerusalem.

Today, I would like to underscore two points, both dictated by the urgency of what we are seeing on the ground — the situation in Gaza, where we are once again on the edge of a cliff, and the Israeli settlement policy, which, through the case of Khan Al-Ahmar, threatens to irreversibly undermine the possibility of a two-State solution.

First, with regard to the situation in Gaza, for the second time since the beginning of the summer the Gaza Strip is on the verge of a new conflict, something it has experienced three times in the past decade. In that context, France calls on all actors to exercise restraint. The rockets that were launched during the

night of Tuesday and Wednesday from Gaza to Israel, one of which hit a house in Beersheba, fortunately without causing any casualties, are an extremely worrying development. I want to say it again with the greatest clarity: France condemns the indiscriminate firing on Israeli territory, regardless of the perpetrators, just as it condemns the use of incendiary devices and the construction by Hamas of offensive tunnels, of which a new one was dismantled again over the past few days by Israeli forces.

Already in mid-August, the worst had been avoided thanks to the efforts of Egypt and the steps taken by the Special Coordinator. However, we know that if the current situation continues, a large-scale escalation cannot be definitively avoided, and if there is one, the people of Gaza will once again pay the price. We must therefore do everything we can to prevent it. It is up to the Council to speak with a strong voice to prevent an escalation by breaking a silence that is becoming increasingly deafening and incomprehensible to the world every day.

Those peaks in tension are arising in the context of humanitarian collapse and political impasse in the Gaza Strip. For more than six months, there has been a series of acts of violence in Gaza against the backdrop of a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented severity. The toll of recurring demonstrations along the separation barrier is appalling: more than 150 Palestinians have been killed since 30 March in rallies fuelled by the despair of the population. France has condemned the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force and calls on Israel to respect the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully, on the one hand, and to live up to its obligations to protect civilians in the context of international humanitarian law, on the other hand. We have also denounced the exploitation of the demonstrations by Hamas and other armed groups and their use in attempts to cross the separation barrier, as seems to have been the case during last Friday's rallies.

To restore hope among the people of Gaza in the short term, we must respond to the humanitarian emergency. The efforts of the Special Coordinator and all United Nations agencies to rapidly improve the humanitarian situation contribute significantly to this response. All actors must coordinate their efforts in this regard. Ultimately, only a lifting of the blockade, together with the necessary security guarantees for Israel, can meet the needs of the people. At the same time, the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains essential, particularly in Gaza, where two thirds of the population are refugees. International drives have raised an additional $120 million for UNRWA at the margins of the General Assembly and must continue to do so. France has played its part and intends to continue to do so by doubling its contribution to the Agency for 2019. The stakes are high both for the populations concerned and for regional stability. Tensions since the start of the school year, in particular in Gaza and Lebanon, attest to that.

Finally, there can be no sustainable humanitarian response to the crisis in Gaza without a political solution, including the full return of the Palestinian Authority to the territory. Gaza is not a landless territory, and it cannot be dissociated from the question of the Palestinian State in the context of the two-State solution. We call on all parties to pursue dialogue in the context of Egypt's ongoing efforts, which we commend, to relaunch the inter-Palestinian reconciliation process within the framework of the agreement reached in Cairo a year ago.

The gravity of the situation in Gaza should not make us forget the severity of the situation in the West Bank and Jerusalem, where the critical advances in settlements are creating an irreversible situation before our very eyes. We are close to the point of no return, and if we are not careful, the two-State solution may disappear before us, like a mirage in the desert. France's position is clear and unchanging: the settlements are illegal under international law and counterproductive because they destroy trust between the parties and stoke tensions on the ground. They are accompanied by worrisome developments in violence, including by certain radical settlers. We have called for all light to be shed on the death of a Palestinian woman last week close to Nablus, which we condemned.

Today, I will focus on the case of Khan Al-Ahmar, which has long been identified by the entire international community as a red line. On 12 September, the Israeli Government decided that it would demolish the village. This decision could be implemented at any time. Together with its main partners, France has expressed its profound concern about this matter and solemnly calls on the Israeli authorities not to proceed with the demolition. The demolition of this Bedouin village, which would result in the forced displacement of its inhabitants, would contravene international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva

Convention, as well as Council resolutions. I note that several of the structures that are directly targeted, including one school, have received European funding.

In addition to its humanitarian consequences, that demolition would have potentially irreversible political effects. It would pave the way for the settlement of the so-called E-1 area, which, as everyone knows, is of strategic importance for the two-State solution. It would separate the north and south of the West Bank and isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian territories. By destroying the continuity of the Palestinian territories, it would make the two-State solution impossible and would instead favour a strategy of de facto annexation of the West Bank by Israel, which would be taking on a heavy responsibility in terms of the history of both peoples.

France is a friend to both the Israelis and the Palestinians. It has no other interest than peace in the region and ensuring the possibility for the populations concerned to live in safety and dignity. As we all know, the destinies of the Israelis and the Palestinians are intertwined; neither of the two peoples will achieve their national aspirations in a sustainable way at the expense of the other.

As I have said, there is no solution other than a two-State solution, but there can be no two-State solution without an agreement between the parties on Jerusalem, and there can by no possible agreement on Jerusalem outside internationally agreed parameters. These parameters are not options or a menu that we can pick and choose from; rather they are the cornerstone of any peace process and any future negotiation. Moving away from this framework would fuel tensions and violence because of the symbolic, historic and religious dimensions of Jerusalem, both for the Palestinians and for the Israelis. It would also provide a space for all radicals in the region, who want to see this political conflict become a religious conflict, to rush into. Given that risk, we have a collective responsibility in the Council to act within the parameters that we have defined together and which are recalled in resolution 2334 (2016), which was adopted almost two years ago. France will spare no effort in that regard.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I want to join others in thanking Special Coordinator Mr. Mladenov for his briefing and for the work that he and his team do on the ground. I want also to thank Mr. El-Ad. Like the French and Swedish representatives, we think it is important that the voices of civil society can be heard in this Chamber, and he was invited by the Security Council.

I wish to digress, if I may, to make a point about non-Council-member speakers, building on the one I made yesterday. This is an open debate. It vitiates the point of an open debate if we cannot understand what is said in the Chamber, no matter who it is said by. I would therefore like to know at some point what the Israeli Permanent Representative said to Mr. El-Ad in Hebrew. I would also like to make a general point that if speakers use a language for which there is no interpretation, that the presidency of the day stop them and ask them to speak in one of the Council's — or the Organization's — six authorized languages.

Turning to the substance, I think Mr. Mladenov is right to remind us that every month we come here and talk about the same things while everything that we have heard today about the region shows how desperate and unsustainable the situation is. There are terrible, cruel and sad stories of deaths and injuries on both sides. These stories underscore the need for urgent progress to end what is a useless cycle of violence and a heartbreaking waste of life and ruined families. On terrorism, to quote a famous playwright: "The gunmen are not dying for the people; the people are dying for the gunmen." We ought to bear that in mind as well.

We fully respect Israel's right to security. At the same time, as many speakers have said today, the situation in Gaza is unsustainable. There needs to be an immediate improvement in the humanitarian situation. We need political resolve to make these improvements. The reconciliation agreement of 2017 was a good start, but now all the Palestinian factions must implement that agreement. We strongly support the efforts of Egypt and the wider international community to secure this goal with some urgency. And we strongly support the return of the Palestinian Authority to administer Gaza. We continue to encourage all parties to work together to ensure that this objective is met.

Like other speakers, we remain deeply concerned about the planned demolition of the village of Khan Al-Ahmar. I take this opportunity to again call on the Israeli Government not to go ahead with its plan to demolish the village. The decision of the Israeli Supreme Court did not mandate demolition, which remains at the discretion of the Israeli Government. We appeal to the Government not to proceed with the demolition of this village, which is located in an area

of strategic importance for the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. Its demolition threatens the prospects for a two-State solution with Jerusalem as a shared capital because, as others have said, it would pave the way for building settlements in the E-1 area.

We have heard a lot of common themes from the speakers today so I will not repeat them. I will just say that the Special Coordinator asked us to echo his three calls — for both sides to step back from the brink, for them to uphold the 2014 ceasefire and for Hamas to stop its provocations; for Israel to restore the delivery of critical supplies and use proportionate responses in their use of live fire; and for the Palestinian Authority to not disengage from Gaza. I am happy to throw the United Kingdom's voice behind his calls today and to make it crystal clear how strong our support is for the Special Coordinator.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was mentioned. In this regard, I would just say that we welcome the increase in donor contributions that was announced on 27 September. They will help meet the immediate needs of the Palestinian people, but in the longer term UNRWA itself needs to continue to give priority to the implementation of cost-saving reform measures. We will continue to work closely with UNRWA and other donors on the continuity of its central services.

In conclusion, like France, we consider ourselves to be a friend to both the Israelis and the Palestinians. Like France, we believe that the destinies of these two people are inextricably intertwined. Substantive peace talks between the parties leading to a two-State solution based on 1967 borders, which includes the West Bank and Gaza, is the best way to end this conflict and ensure a sustainable peace. It is the best way to ensure Israeli security, which is absolutely vital, and to achieve a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the Palestinian refugee question, in line with Council resolution 1515 (2003). The United Kingdom will continue engaging meaningfully to help bring this about.

Finally, I want to say that I have concentrated today on subject matter that the Special Coordinator raised. I think I am right to do so. Other speakers touched on wider matters. I do not have time now to go into the issue of child soldiers, but I would just like to put on record that the United Kingdom shares the concerns about these child soldiers.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I want to thank you, Madam President, for giving me the floor. I also want to convey our appreciation to the delegation of Bolivia for having included this extremely important item in the programme of work of its presidency in this month of October. I also wish to thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Mladenov for his excellent briefing today. Despite the difficulties he faces, the collective work that he represents has always been commendable.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is very concerned about the brutal and ongoing events that, for many years, have claimed numerous human lives and e threatened the security in various places in the Middle East, which is a situation that has led to massive internal and external displacement of millions of people in certain countries of the region, such as Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Libya, to name just a few. The United Nations and the international community must now find a sustainable solution to these conflicts, in which warring parties have extinguished the hope of the people, despite the fact that the passage of years has shown that the conflicts can have no military solution.

On the Palestinian question, I would like to first express our most heartfelt condolences to the conflicting parties. We join them in solidarity over the thousands of citizens who have lost their lives during the seven decades of this long, tragic history, to which we have always given due attention since our State's inception. Like other countries, Equatorial Guinea is dismayed at the persistence of the conflict and the stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on conditions for the creation of a Palestinian State.

In recent years, we have seen a massive increase in violence in the region by parties to the conflict. The improvised rockets from Gaza and the disproportionate responses of the Israeli army frighten both sides. The impact of those unnecessary exchanges has mired the Palestinian population in Gaza in undesirable living conditions, with destroyed infrastructure and insufficient basic daily means of subsistence, including an elevated rate of unemployment, mainly among young people. These and other aspects of the situation described in the media are the result of the insurgency in an area dominated by fear and destruction, leading to a precarious and unprosperous future for both sides.

But there is another reality that both Israelis and Palestinian must recognize, whether they like it or

not — both peoples will always be there, side by side. Accordingly, the parties would be well served to foster a peaceful and harmonious coexistence. In this regard, the Israeli and Palestinian leaders must engage in political and moral analysis on the future they want for their people, considering that the best future Israelis can wish for their children necessarily involves the creation of an independent Palestinian State, and a future Palestinian State will not exist unless Israel's security is guaranteed.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is convinced of the crucial role of the United Nations on the Palestinian question. Since it was put on the agenda in 1947 up to today, both the General Assembly and the Security Council have taken very significant steps that could have resolved the conflict, which is reflected in the various important resolutions that have been adopted on the topic. The implementation of these resolutions and the effectiveness of the work of the United Nations call for unreserved unity among the members of the Council. History has demonstrated that Israelis and Palestinians cannot easily resume negotiations, let alone reach an agreement, if the Council and the international community do not engage in a more united and positive manner.

Ever since we began our membership of the Council, we have called for the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We believe that insecurity in that densely populated enclave and tension with Israel concerning that area are caused by the considerable power vacuum. That vacuum, which contributes only to the deterioration of local living conditions, could pave the way for extremist organizations in the surrounding areas to gain greater access to young people. That, in turn, would increase the level of insecurity in the region. In that regard, we again call on the international community to provide greater support for the initiative of Egypt and other international actors working on intra-Palestinian reconciliation, while bearing in mind that the peace agreement signed in October last year between Hamas and Fatah has not been implemented.

We welcome the efforts of certain countries that recently announced an increase in their contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, because of its ongoing financial crisis, is in danger of reducing the number of important services it provides to millions of Palestinian citizens.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the position of Equatorial Guinea, which, in line with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid guiding principles, the Quartet road map and other instruments, considers the claims of the Palestinians, which are based on history, to be just. We therefore reiterate our support for the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, which should be the subject of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians so as to ensure a safe and peaceful coexistence between the two States and harmony with other States of the region.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for a very comprehensive and insightful briefing. I also thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for his contribution.

I would also like to align myself with the statement to be delivered later today on behalf of the European Union.

Despite our constant calls for de-escalation in the Middle East, there has, unfortunately, been no progress at all. On the contrary, we have failed to prevent further loss of life. Recent developments in the Gaza Strip, where thousands of Palestinians have demonstrated, some of them violently, are very worrying. Unfortunately, at least six Palestinians were killed and hundreds injured. Once again, we call on all sides to act with utmost restraint in order to avoid further casualties. On the one hand, Israel should respect the principle of proportionality in its use of force. On the other, protests at the Gaza border fence, fuelled by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, have led to violence, which affects both parties to the conflict. Recurring rocket attacks from Gaza aimed at Israel, as well as the launching of incendiary kites and balloons from the Strip, which have been aimed at nearby Israeli communities, are unacceptable and must stop. Very worrying signals are also coming from the West Bank, where a Palestinian woman was killed by stone-throwing. On the Israeli side, three civilians have also been killed in recent days and weeks, including two Israelis killed by a Palestinian co-worker at the Barkan Industrial Park. We firmly condemn such incidents and call for a swift investigation to bring those responsible to justice.

The humanitarian situation of 2 million people in the Gaza Strip is still alarming. Limited access to basic services, including health care, chronic energy crises

and the lack of fuel, can easily lead to the escalation of social tensions that may destabilize the situation in the region even further. In that regard, we commend the efforts of Special Coordinator Mladenov to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the Strip, including the fuel-delivery deal reached last week, thanks to his engagement. The danger of Gaza's collapse is real. That is why we strongly urge all parties to de-escalate, exercise maximum restraint and prevent incidents that jeopardize the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Our main goal and commitment should be the resumption of a meaningful peace process. We still believe that only by returning to meaningful bilateral negotiations, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, will it be possible to bring positive input to the process. That is the only path towards a two-State solution and the resolution of all final-status issues. The creation of a political horizon, as well as an appropriate framework for political progress, will be possible only by working together with our regional and international partners, starting with the Middle East Quartet. We wish to especially underline the engagement of the United States and its peace proposal, which, when revealed, could help with the reactivation of the Middle East peace process.

We support the two-State solution, under which the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict would be met, including the Palestinian right to self-determination and independence, as well as the Israeli right to ensure its security. Unfortunately, the two-State solution seems to be at risk of fading away. The likely demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar in the very near future and subsequent Israeli settlement plans, potentially splitting the West Bank into two parts, would make the two-State solution almost impossible.

We are closely following Egyptian-led discussions on intra-Palestinian reconciliation and hope that that process will be successful. We, therefore, urge all Palestinian factions to work together to achieve the sustainable development of that process, thereby allowing the Palestinian Authority to resume its full responsibilities in Gaza. One single and legitimate Palestinian Authority could be an important step towards ensuring the unity of a future Palestinian State and providing a basis for a sustainable peace agreement.

In conclusion, let me underline the severe funding difficulties of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Collective efforts by the international community have enabled UNRWA to continue providing essential services until the end of this year. The termination of UNRWA's important activities could well cause instability and create a vacuum that would serve only the extremists. We should do our utmost to preserve the crucial role played by UNRWA in the region.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire welcomes today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We thank Special Coordinator Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, whose briefing has provided us with the context surrounding the multiple and complex challenges to peace and stability in a region notably affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We also thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad for his briefing.

My delegation is concerned about the breakdown in the relative lull in the conflict owing to renewed violence between Israelis and Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Faced with this new outbreak of violence, Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that there is no alternative to a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and urges the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from unilateral actions that can only damage and distance prospects for a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

My country values both the security of the State of Israel and the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. We reaffirm our firm support for the two-State solution, namely, peaceful coexistence within the 1967 borders. Consequently, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call on the Israeli and Palestinian parties to show restraint in order to preserve the achievements won so far and create conditions favourable to a just and lasting peace.

We need hardly recall that the consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been disastrous for the people living in the Gaza Strip. That unprecedented humanitarian crisis is accompanied by a high youth unemployment rate of up to 47 per cent, as well as by incessant shortages of water and electricity. That is why my delegation calls for the opening of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians with a view to lifting the current blockade. We also encourage the Palestinian parties, on the basis of enhanced cooperation, to pursue dialogue for an effective return of the Palestinian

Authority to Gaza, which would enable humanitarian issues to be better addressed.

Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the budget deficit facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). That situation jeopardizes the effectiveness of the assistance and protection provided by that United Nations agency to more than three million Palestinian refugees. Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the pledges made by donor countries on the sidelines of the general debate of the General Assembly at its current session of $122 million to UNRWA, which will enable it to fulfil its mission.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire would like to assure all stakeholders of its support for initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue promoting the achievement of lasting peace and stability between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as throughout the region.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing. The Kingdom of the Netherlands fully supports the Special Coordinator in his efforts to prevent a catastrophe in Gaza, and we thank him for his tireless efforts for peace aimed at bringing the parties closer together, despite all obvious obstacles.

Allow me to also thank Mr. El-Ad for his views on the situation as a guest of the Council, and I would like to underline the point made by our British colleague in that regard. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is a long-standing donor to B'Tselem and we are proud of our cooperation with that non-governmental organization. The presence of a strong and vibrant civil society, including human rights organizations like B'Tselem that speak truth to power, is crucial for a democratic and pluralistic society.

I align myself with the statement to be made later by the observer of the European Union (EU). In my statement today, I will focus on three key issues: the West Bank, Gaza and the importance of a renewal of the peace process.

My first point concerns the West Bank. Listening to Mr. Mladenov and Mr. El-Ad, it struck me that their briefings were packed with the latest troubling developments on the West Bank. Those developments raise concerns that the region is on a slippery slope, sliding towards a one-State reality. The Kingdom of the Netherlands reiterates its opposition to Israel's settlement policy and to actions taken in that vein, including demolitions and confiscations of EU-funded projects, evictions and the forced transfer of local communities.

We are greatly concerned about the decision taken on Sunday by the Israeli authorities to advance plans to expand settlements in Hebron. Such settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace, and threaten a two-State solution. The Israeli settlement policy and the denial of opportunities for Palestinian development in Area C make peace more difficult. Khan Al-Ahmar, as others have said, is a case in point. We are concerned that the planned demolition and forced transfer of its inhabitants will undermine confidence in a negotiated two-State solution. It will also clear the way for further settlement expansion. That is illustrated by the announcement of new houses for settlements near Khan Al-Ahmar earlier this year in May.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands condemns the recent violent attacks in the West Bank, which led to the loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives. Such attacks illustrate the need for a sustainable solution that provides peace and security for Israel and prevents the resurgence of terrorism. Such a solution must provide security for Palestinians, respect their rights and demonstrate that the occupation is over. In short, we need a two-State solution.

That brings me to my second point, concerning Gaza, where the situation is a constant source of concern. People in and around Gaza live a daily reality that no one should have to endure. People there deserve a life in which peace and security can be taken for granted. Unfortunately, that is far from the current reality: early on Wednesday morning, an Israeli family in Beersheba narrowly escaped when they reached a bomb shelter seconds before a rocket from Gaza hit their home. We condemn the firing of rockets from Gaza. In response, the Israel Defence Forces struck multiple targets in Gaza, reportedly killing a 25-year-old Palestinian man. We call on all actors involved to exercise restraint in order to prevent a further escalation. Closing border crossings and reducing the fishing zone is not the answer and will only cause the humanitarian situation in Gaza to deteriorate further.

We are concerned by the growing violence during protests at the border and the continued use

of incendiary balloons and kites, as well as tunnel activity. The Kingdom of the Netherlands calls upon all relevant Palestinian parties to ensure that protests remain peaceful, especially so that children are not put in harm's way. We also repeat our call on Israel to ensure that its responses are proportionate and necessary at all times, in line with Israel's obligations under international law. An independent and transparent investigation into the events that led to so many victims over the past months is needed. We call upon Israel to finalize its own investigation as soon as possible and provide full transparency on its findings.

We fully support the efforts of Mr. Mladenov to improve the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. We call upon all parties to create an environment in which such plans can be implemented. We join the calls of others upon the parties concerned to continue their cooperation with the Special Coordinator and to make sure that no effort is spared to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The implementation of his plans will bring sorely needed relief to Gaza.

Ultimately, a sustainable solution is needed to alleviate living conditions in Gaza. That means intra-Palestinian reconciliation leading to the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We welcome ongoing Egyptian efforts to make that a reality.

We continue to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The services offered by UNRWA provide opportunity, hope and dignity for Palestine refugees. This year, with the help of many old and new donors from the region and globally, UNRWA managed to broaden its support base. Together with other donors, we will continue to work with UNRWA to close the remaining gap for this year. We encourage all partners of UNRWA to translate this year's generous contributions into predictable, multi-annual support.

My third point concerns the renewal of the peace process. Over the past years, we have noted many threats to the peace process. I regret that today we have been forced to discuss many negative steps that have been taken by all parties to the conflict. Again, we are only discussing measures needed to manage the conflict. However, conflict management is not what we are here for. We, the Council, the United Nations and both sides of the conflict have the same goal — to end the conflict. We remain firmly committed to that goal and call on all parties to combine efforts, return to the negotiation table and restart a genuine peace process leading to a two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

First of all, I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing today. I also thank Mr. El-Ad, and, on behalf of the Security Council, apologize to him for the ill-treatment received by him today. I initially wanted to return to what happened to make a clarification concerning the human rights record of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, of which we are very proud, but that would show a lack of respect to the State and the people of Palestine. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the human rights of the Palestinians, which continue to be violated by the Israeli occupation, and not those of the Bolivians.

Accordingly, I will begin my statement by expressing Bolivia's firm rejection of the extreme violence with which the Israeli Defence Forces have been repressing the Palestinian civilian population. Such actions, which are unjustified no matter where they occur, only undermine the achievement of a long-sought, just and lasting peace for the Palestinian people, who have been living under the Israeli siege for more than 70 years. The illegal actions of the Government of Israel, including its settlement policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, constitute an obstacle and a threat to stability in the region, and, as members of the Security Council, we bear the unavoidable responsibility to act in order to prevent Israel from continuing to enjoy impunity as a State.

In that order of priorities, we categorically reject the clear intention of the Israeli Government to alter the demographic composition and territorial character of the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, which has been under occupation since 1967. All such actions are illegal and constitute a violation of the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, as reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), on the legal invalidity of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories, which constitute a flagrant violation of international law.

Bolivia expresses its unequivocal rejection of Israel's expansionist and annexationist policy. One such example of that policy is illustrated by Israel's plan to demolish the Bedouin-Palestinian village of Khan

Al-Ahmar, located in Area C to the north-east of East Jerusalem in the West Bank, where the Israeli Defence Forces forcibly entered with heavy equipment to demolish the homes of almost 200 Palestinian civilians, who will be relocated by force and compelled to abandon their homes, their daily lives and their history. We therefore call on the international community, including the Security Council, not to recognize any change whatsoever to the 1967 borders. The Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, constitute a single territory.

We also demand that the Government of Israel end the blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has been living under a regime of collective punishment for 11 years, which deprives Palestinians of access to water and sanitation, infringes on their human right to health care and restricts their access to decent employment and the freedom of movement, together with a long list of violations that everyone in this Chamber has been witness to month after month and year after year.

As it has on previous occasions, Bolivia expresses its firm commitment to all international efforts leading to a peaceful solution to the occupation of Palestine. In that regard, we join in supporting initiatives, such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and others, that would ensure a just and lasting peace in which both peoples could live within recognized and secure borders.

I also sincerely commend the humanitarian work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, benefiting more than 5 million Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. We call on the States Members of the Organization to continue making their valuable contributions to the Agency so that it can finally overcome its current crisis, which is only resulting in the deterioration of the quality of life of all Palestinian refugees.

Bolivia believes that the only option for a long-term solution to the occupation is the two-State solution, whereby a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 internationally recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, can finally be established, pursuant to the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I also wish to inform all concerned that, with the consent of the members of the Security Council, I will suspend this meeting between 1.20 p.m. and 3 p.m.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me begin by commending the Permanent Mission of Bolivia on its competent management of the work of the Security Council for the month of October. I wish it every success. I also congratulate the delegation of the United States on its outstanding efforts during its presidency of the Council last month.

A few weeks ago, the leaders of our States met at the high-level segment of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. The statements of many of them reflected the real concerns of the international community about the future of multilateralism and the urgent need to maintain, defend and promote. The clearest manifestation of that need is embodied today in the Palestinian question.

The intensity, immensity and complexity of conflicts and tensions in the Middle East are growing at an unprecedented rate. The Palestinian question is currently at a critical juncture. In fact, the agreed principles for a political solution, based on international law and many international resolutions, are being systematically undermined. We must raise our voices from this very Chamber to underscore that multilateralism is the only way to resolve the problems facing the world, on top of which is the Palestinian question.

Lebanon has always considered the two-State solution to be the only sustainable political solution to this conflict, based on all resolutions of international legitimacy. That entails ending the occupation and establishing an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, while fully ensuring the right of return of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The foundations of just and comprehensive peace are completely embodied in the Arab Peace Initiative.

Peace is long overdue, and the Security Council must use its influence, authority and tools to achieve peace.

Despite delays, Lebanon is working hard to form a Government of national unity following the most recent parliamentary elections. We hope that the new Government will represent another important step towards strengthening the State institutional structure. Lebanon is currently undertaking a series of important commitments, in particular by following up on the recommendations emanating from the support conferences held earlier this year in Rome, Paris and Brussels. Lebanon seriously looks forward to implementing those recommendations meaningfully and optimally in order to support its security and economy.

Everyone knows that Lebanon continues to face major challenges as a result of regional crises, in particular the Syrian crisis. We continue to host more than 1.5 million displaced Syrians, which is significantly straining our economy, society, security and infrastructure.

The funding crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East puts more pressure on Lebanon, as it continues to host hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, while the chances of a political solution for the Palestinian question are dwindling, as we have heard today. In addition, Israel continues to violate the sovereignty of Lebanon and threatens its security through its ongoing occupation of Lebanese territory and daily air, land and sea violations.

On 31 August, the Council sent a strong message of support on the stability and sovereignty of Lebanon by adopting resolution 2433 (2018). That resolution once again reflected the united position of the Council and the international community on the priority need to preserve the stability of Lebanon by maintaining the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The Government of Lebanon stresses its full commitment to resolution 1701 (2006). In that context, the Lebanese Armed Forces are making great efforts to build and develop their capacities in order to ensure that they fulfil their role completely. They are cooperating on an ongoing basis with UNIFIL to implement Lebanon's relevant commitments, hoping to reach a permanent ceasefire, as stipulated in the resolution.

Lebanon is working with the Tripartite Mechanism to decrease tensions and preserve the security and stability of its southern borders. Despite that, in the General Assembly last month (see A/73/PV.10), the Prime Minister of Israel implicitly threatened to target Lebanese civilian and Government facilities, such as the international airport and national stadium. His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs responded to those threats by organizing a field visit for the diplomatic corps in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, Lebanon stresses from this Chamber the need for the Council and the Organization to prevent Israel from using any pretext to launching new aggression against Lebanon, which threatens the lives, safety and future of the Lebanese people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Tayel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing today and for his ongoing efforts to achieve a settlement to the Palestine question. I also thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad for his participation in today's meeting and his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

I do not believe that anyone present in the Council was surprised by the mention of violations against the Palestinian people under occupation or the injustice to which they are subjected. Council members and the international community are well aware of those violations. While some may feel bored by hearing of the same old problems, practices and various kinds of suffering periodically over and over again in the Council for long years, it is important for us to bear in mind that what we hear is not mere rhetoric or meaningless numbers and statistics. It is a reality being lived by Palestinian families on the ground, whose homes have been demolished or whose land has been taken in favour of the settlements. It is a reality being lived by entire generations of Palestinian refugees scattered throughout the world —generations born and live without a homeland, or under siege, or behind bars.

The Palestinian question has existed as long as the Council itself. Contrary to what some may believe, that is not due to division or inaction on the part of the Council. The resolutions adopted by the Council since 1967 have established a framework agreed by the international community and in line with international law and human conscience, beginning with resolution 242 (1967) up to resolution 2334 (2016), which contains

decisive elements for achieving a settlement, including the 4 June 1967 borders and the status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif within the two-State solution, in addition to clear law provisions with regard to settlements, homes demolition and the need to restart direct negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

In that regard, it is important to reiterate that those decisive factors have not disappeared or expired with the passing of time. They constitute inalienable rights. I note that the issue at hand has nothing to do with seeking a solution. A solution already exists that is known and conforms to the legal and humanitarian principles that we all acknowledge. What is lacking is the will to implement the solution and sometimes the political will. I recall the fact that a commitment to rights has never been the cause of the failure of a political settlement. On the contrary, forgetting and attempting to circumvent rights is the cause for the failure of the international community to achieve peace in years past.

The humanitarian tragedy endured for years in the Gaza Strip is a grave situation that is the consequence of the ongoing occupation and the failure to uphold international law. Gaza is an integral part of the Palestinian territories, and the issue of Gaza cannot be addressed separately from the political issue as a whole. The crisis in Gaza was not born in a vacuum. At this point, I wish to warn of significant pressures being applied on the residents of Gaza and of a potential explosion of the situation there as a consequence of the energy crisis, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) crisis, confrontations with the Israeli security forces that claim the lives of dozens of Palestinians, or the obstacles to movement in and out of Gaza Strip.

In that regard, Egypt is addressing the crisis based on its principled humanitarian commitment to and in solidarity with our Palestinian brothers. Despite the security conditions and the lack of legal responsibility, we have opened the Rafah crossing for individuals in order to ease the crisis. That is an exceptional measure, but it is not enough if Israel fails to uphold its responsibilities under international law and if the Palestinian Authority fails to establish its authority throughout the Gaza Strip. Egypt has also made diligent efforts to prevent further clashes in Gaza. In that regard, we thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for supporting such efforts.

We continue to call for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and on Palestinian parties to accelerate their response to Egypt's efforts to promote reconciliation. I also call on the international community and members of the Council, particularly those with the greatest influence, to support those efforts and to gradually build on them, particularly the steps already taken by the Palestinian National Authority to control the crossings in the Gaza Strip. It is important to consider how to build on that and to benefit from previous experiences regarding movement to and from the Gaza Strip.

In conclusion, we embrace any meaningful initiative for a comprehensive political settlement in the coming period. We stand ready to support any such initiatives, both politically and practically. We call on the Israelis and the Palestinians to reciprocate by making efforts based on upholding the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, in line with the resolutions previously mentioned. We reiterate that the Palestinian question remains the pivotal issue in the region. If any ideas or efforts are to achieve success, it is important not to overlook that reality or link the issue to other arrangements in the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8375 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8375th meeting
Thursday, 18 October 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Cordova Soria	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Lie Cheng
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Bieke
	Equatorial Guinea	Ms. Avomo Sima
	Ethiopia	Mr. Gebru
	France	Mrs. Philippe
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Almowaizri
	Netherlands	Ms. Algra
	Peru	Mr. Talavera
	Poland	Mr. Zawieja
	Russian Federation	Mrs. Gilmutdinova
	Sweden	Mr. Lundkvist
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Fink
	United States of America	Ms. Sutton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Costa Rica to participate in this meeting.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am addressing the Council today as a main stakeholder in today's agenda item, given that the Arab Syrian Golan is under Israeli occupation. As such, allow me, Madam President, to deliver my statement in full.

It has been more than seven decades since Israel occupied the Palestinian territories and unleashed the tragedy and misery of more than 5 million Palestinian refugees who have been expelled from their country and dispossessed of their land, homes and livelihood. For more than seven decades, some countries, including members of the Security Council, have been relentlessly attempting to legitimize the odious Israeli occupation, which on 5 June 1967 spread to the Syrian Golan. Those attempts were recently crowned by the launch of provocative deals and initiatives.

The question we must ask ourselves now is: How many decades must the Israeli occupation continue before some finally admit that the Security Council must take serious action to bring it to an end? How many more innocent lives must be lost before some are convinced that the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories is indeed the root cause of instability in our region? There is a long list of questions I could ask in this regard.

My Government wishes to reaffirm its consistent and principled position of support for the Palestinian people in their aspirations to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State throughout the Palestinian territories, with Jerusalem as its capital, while guaranteeing the right to return of refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. Any measures that will or seek to undermine these rights are null and void. Such measures, including the apartheid law adopted by Israel known as the "nation-State law" and the decision of the United States Government to transfer its Embassy to the occupied city of Jerusalem and to stop funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) threaten peace and security in the region and throughout the world. All these measures are null and void and violate the relevant resolutions of both the Council and the General Assembly.

Israel continues to occupy a cherished part of our territory in the Syrian Golan. The Syrian people there continue to suffer from the occupation and its practices of repression and aggression. Israel, as members know, has provided protection and logistical and even direct military to terrorist organizations that have launched repeated attacks against Syrian territory. In so doing, they have violated the 1947 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. They have also exposed the forces of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) to grave danger due to the terrorist activities that the Israeli occupation authority sponsors in the occupied Syrian Golan.

In this regard, I note that on 8 October, the occupying authority issued an illegal and unjust verdict against Syrian activist Sedqi Suleiman Al-Maqet, who is the Mandela of Syria. Astonishingly, it decided to imprison him for 11 years. The only reason for this 11-year verdict was because he had documented — using recordings and photographs — the collaboration of the Israeli occupation forces with the Al-Nusrah Front in the disengagement zone of the occupied Golan.

Israeli attacks on scientific and civilian infrastructure in Syria are irrefutable proof of a new stage in Israel's exercise of State terrorism. In terms of crime, terrorism and killing civilians, Israel is on its way to compete with Da'esh and Al-Nusrah Front. In addition, Israel evacuated hundreds of the so-called White Helmets — a terrorist organization — to their sponsoring countries to carry out attacks against Syria.

Unfortunately, all of this frenzied escalation has not been acknowledged in reports issued by senior United Nations officials. As we heard this morning, these officials spoke of detecting a kite but they were unable to record Israel's collaboration with terrorist organizations in the disengagement zone in the occupied Syrian Golan. Such are the reports issued by the Secretariat.

In resolution 497 (1981), which was adopted unanimously, the Council stated that the decision taken by Israel on 17 December 1981 to impose Israeli jurisdiction over the occupied Syrian Golan was null and void and without international legal effect. The resolution called on Israel, the occupying Power, to rescind all measures and decisions in the occupied Syrian Golan immediately. I remind the Council that this took place in December 1981. Resolution 497 (1981) called on the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the implementation of that resolution within two weeks of its adoption. Meanwhile, the Council decided that, if Israel did not comply with resolution 497 (1981), the Council would hold exceptionally another meeting no later than 5 January 1982 in order to examine in depth the necessary measures to be undertaken in line with the Charter of the United Nations.

Under the principles of international law, I put the following question to the Council. Thirty-seven years after the adoption of resolution 497 (1981), what is the current status of this resolution and why has it not been implemented? Why has the Council not compelled Israel to end the occupation of the Syrian Golan? The Council should have enacted another resolution in January 1982. We have been waiting 37 years for the Council to implement resolution 497 (1981). Some colleagues wonder about the reasons for persisting conflicts in the Middle East. Why are there wars in the Middle East? What are the root causes of violence in the Middle East? They do not know that we are still waiting for the implementation of a Council resolution adopted 37 years ago to liberate the Golan and Jerusalem from the Israeli occupation and to create a Palestinian State. These are the root causes of the war; these are the root causes of the violence.

The Syrian Government categorically rejects the decision of Israel, the occupying Power, to hold elections for so-called local councils in the occupied Syrian Golan. Residents of the Golan have reiterated their rejection of all measures of the repressive Israeli entity seeking to impose its jurisdiction on them, including the organization of so-called local councils in October. Mr. Mladenov did not address this issue or comment on it.

It is unacceptable that the United Nations and Member States continue to treat this odious occupation as if it were simply a routine matter, without taking any serious action leading to tangible results, especially after the statement made by the Prime Minister of the Israeli entity on 8 October, which proves that Israel has no interest in the Charter of the United Nations and is determined to violate Council's resolutions, including resolution 497 (1981). The Israeli Prime Minister said:

> "Israel on the Golan Heights is a solid reality based on ancient rights. Israel on the Golan Heights is a fact that the international community must recognize."

He also said that "as long as it depends on me, the Golan Heights will always remain under Israeli sovereignty."

Unfortunately, this serious statement and all the serious developments in the Golan have not attracted the attention of Mr. Mladenov, who turned a blind eye to such developments in his briefing. He likewise failed to mention any of the various and multiple resolutions of the United Nations that call on the occupying Power to end the occupation of Arab territories. We regret that Mr. Mladenov has transformed his important role of Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process into that of a simple journalist.

We recall that General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX) qualifies occupation as the top form of aggression. All those who remain silent on the occupation are therefore partners in that act of aggression against our peoples. To those who seek to turn the meetings of the Council into a media show, simply to prevent definitive legal measures from being taken to bring the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories to an end; to those who vigorously pursue other wars in our region to deplete the potential of our peoples, we say that they are responsible for future developments. We are determined to liberate our territory by all means available to us under the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Council resolutions, no matter how long it takes us. Indeed, we have the right to do so and the law is on our side.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Ms. Scott (Namibia): I congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October, and I thank you for organizing this debate on the important topic of the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov and Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for their comprehensive and detailed briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Namibians are deeply concerned by Mr. Mladenov's recent report, which states that Israeli settlement expansion has continued in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We were informed that plans for some 2,800 units had been proposed, some 900 additional units were approved, and tenders for over 1,700 housing units were announced. As reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), those settlements are illegal under international law, represent a serious impediment to the two-State solution, and diminish hope for peace. We also note the ongoing destruction of Palestinian-owned structures over the past five months by Israeli authorities, which has led to the displacement of 145 Palestinians, including 82 children.

Violence represents an impediment to peace. The Great March of Return protests along the Gaza-Israel border fence demand that Palestinian refugees and their descendants be allowed to return to the land from which they were displaced. Namibia is concerned that since March, violence along the fence has been frequent, with dozens killed and injured following the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israel. On at least three occasions, the situation escalated dramatically. We thank Egypt and the United Nations, which intervened to de-escalate tensions.

The ongoing violence and tension along the border fence has further compounded the situation in Gaza, which remains on the brink of collapse. The overall humanitarian and economic situation continues to deteriorate. More than 53 per cent of the population is unemployed, households receive electricity for three to four hours per day, access to clean water has not improved, and major strain is being placed on the health system.

The situation in Gaza has been exacerbated by the recent decision taken by the United States to terminate its funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is a stabilizing factor across the region, offering educational, health and social services — a lifeline for Palestinian refugees. The recent proposal made by the mayor of Jerusalem to remove UNRWA-run programmes in the city is a cause for serious concern. If implemented, it will worsen the already harsh conditions of the Palestinian refugees.

The decision taken by the United States Administration to stop funding UNRWA follows other decisions that represent an impediment to peace and an obstacle to the two-State solution. In December 2017, the United States announced its recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In May, the United States officially transferred its Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. That decision was condemned in General Assembly resolution ES-10/19 of December 2017, overwhelmingly adopted by Member States. That resolution notes that "Jerusalem is a final status issue to be resolved through negotiations in line with relevant United Nations resolutions". The decision taken by the United States in September to close the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office in Washington, D.C., under the pretext that the PLO has not taken steps to advance the start of direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel is also counterproductive. What is needed is dialogue, not more alienation.

As a child of the United Nations that fought tirelessly for its independence, Namibia will always support Palestine in its fight for self-determination. During the debate held a few weeks ago, most Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their strong support for the Palestinian cause. Support for Palestine was also demonstrated in its election as Chair of the Group of 77 and China for the year 2019.

In conclusion, we call on the Israeli Government to end all construction of settlements and the destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure. We call for Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We urge all parties to return to the negotiation table to ensure that the Palestinian people are able to exercise their inalienable rights in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and as a rightful member of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): We thank the Bolivian presidency for organizing this open debate.

We are meeting at a particularly poignant juncture in the political history of the Middle East. Today, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Oslo Accords, the sense of hope and optimism created by the two-State solution has given way to despondency and despair. As the fundamental tenets of the two-State solution are

being systematically dismantled in the plain sight of the international community, it comes as no surprise that there are few people in the region who believe that peace can be achieved in their lifetime. Many more question if peace is at all possible.

An unfortunate sequence of events has exacerbated that sense of despondency. Long-standing resolutions of the Security Council on the status of Jerusalem have been flouted and cast aside. The illegal expansion of Israeli settlements into the occupied territory continues with intensity and impunity. The recent Israeli decision to dismantle the Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar is only one more manifestation of the occupying Power's long-standing policy of forcibly displacing Palestinians from their lands. That measure takes fresh aim at the roots of Palestinian identity and their existence as a people. The killing fields of Gaza continue to be drenched with the blood of innocent Palestinians — over 200 civilians have been killed since peaceful protests began in March, including another seven on 12 October.

The decision by the United States to cease all financial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has not only cast a deep shadow of uncertainty over the long-term sustainability of many of its critical activities, including education, health and social services, it also runs the risk of unravelling the peace dividend gained through the work of that important Agency. From its very inception, UNRWA has served as a vehicle for political stability and social cohesion in its areas of operation.

The humanitarian needs of the Palestinian refugees should not be sacrificed at the altar of political expediency and narrow interests, all the more so when the prospect for a just settlement of the Palestine issue remains more distant than ever. As members of the international community, we must collectively endeavour to preserve the integrity of the Agency's core services to 5.3 million Palestinian refugees.

Pakistan's commitment to our Palestinian brethren remains firm and abiding. As an expression of our solidarity, Pakistan will make an additional contribution to UNRWA this year. The international community must also continue to lend its voice in support of a two-State solution, based on agreed parameters and the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the capital of the Palestinian State.

As instability and violence continue to ravage many parts of the Middle East, the imperative for diplomatic solutions is more urgent than ever. Syrian stakeholders are working towards the establishment of an inclusive constitutional committee, and we commend the diligent efforts over the past five years of the Secretary-General's outgoing Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, in pursuit of the goal of a negotiated settlement in Syria.

Pakistan will continue to lend its support to a negotiated settlement in Yemen, based on agreed frameworks and through inclusive political engagement. Immediate measures to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Yemeni people must remain an equally urgent international priority. The plight of the Palestinians is as old as the United Nations itself. It is also intrinsic and integral to lasting peace in the region.

Over the years, as international efforts to bring an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people have faltered and failed, the burning cauldron of anger and pervasive sense of injustice have inescapably sown the seeds of animosity and violence in the entire region, fuelling instability and intensifying insecurity across the Middle East.

If we want to put out these fires of conflict, we must act decisively against injustice and oppression across the region and across the world. It is time to bring an end to the tragedy of Palestine. It is time to inspire hopes of peace and mutual coexistence for the entire region.

Despite the heavy odds, our pursuit of this worthy endeavour should be renewed with even greater resolve and determination.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Madam, for the work you have done as President of the Council this month and for having convened this important meeting. I would like also to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing.

Aisha Mohammed was a 45-year-old Palestinian Arab woman and the mother of eight children. She was murdered in cold blood by a group of Israeli settlers last Friday. Hers was a terrible death. She was stoned to death as she was with her husband, leaving her children motherless. She was killed just for being

a Palestinian woman. That criminal act is but one of the many examples of the ongoing violations carried out by Israeli settlers and soldiers against unarmed Palestinians. It is not enough that they have occupied the land; now they are targeting Palestinian lives, property and holy places.

Among the most heinous Israeli crimes that are being currently committed is the forced eviction of Palestinian residents from Khan Al-Ahmar, in the West Bank, and the unjust blockade that Israel continues to impose on Gaza. All of this requires us to reiterate our call on both the international community and the Security Council to protect the Palestinian people and to bring pressure to bear on Israel to implement international resolutions.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemns all Israeli violations and rejects all attempts to undermine the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. It reaffirms the Arab and Muslim identity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the right of the Palestinian State to exercise its sovereignty throughout all Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif. My country also condemns Israeli practices in the occupied Arab Syrian Golan. We reject all illegitimate attempts by Israel to annex the Golan. The Kingdom underscores the importance of a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, a strategic choice that puts an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict through the two-State solution on the basis of the international terms of reference; the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which stipulates the creation of a Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders; the return of refugees; and an end to the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and Lebanese territory.

The fraternal Syrian people continue to endure the horrors of the violations and crimes against humanity perpetrated by a regime that has lost its legitimacy and sense of humanity. I will limit myself to what I said yesterday in the Council (see S/PV.8373) and stress the importance of urgently establishing a constitutional committee so that it can begin its work of drafting a new national Syrian constitution. This would be a turning point in the Syrian political process and would put an end to hostilities by all parties, bringing about a peaceful transition of power to the representatives of the Syrian people, on the basis of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015).

My country denounces the Iranian Government's persistent occupation of the three United Arab Emirates islands — Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, in the Arab Gulf — as well as violations of the sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates, which undermine security and stability in the region and threaten international peace and security. We reaffirm the full sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates over their three islands and support all peaceful measures undertaken by that country to recover their sovereignty over those occupied islands.

Many States have suffered, and continue to suffer, as a result of Iran's aggressive and flagrant interventions in their domestic affairs, which have destabilized the region. These include its support for the coup militias in Yemen and its lack of respect for international resolutions, especially resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015). It also threatens continually to block maritime traffic, in particular the Strait of Hormuz. It carries out manoeuvres around Bab Al-Mandab and maintains a presence south of the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea through its vessels and ships.

Perhaps the Council is aware of the fact that a commercially registered vessel, 150 metres long, equipped with machine guns and military boats as well as espionage equipment, is travelling south of the Red Sea. It receives and sends speedboats carrying equipment and material that is clearly not commercial. This Iranian vessel, the *Saviz*, is a military operational centre that jeopardizes the security and safety of international maritime transit. In addition, Iran continuously supports armed terrorist groups that are destabilizing security and stability in the region and throughout the world, such as the terrorist Hizbullah.

The evidence of this revolutionary regime's interference in the internal affairs of States of the region and worldwide, as well as its support for terrorism, is clear and striking. As noted in paragraph 10 of the twenty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (see S/2018/705), submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities:

> "Al-Qaida leaders in the Islamic Republic of Iran have grown more prominent, working with Ayman al-Zawahiri and projecting his authority more effectively than he could previously. They have influenced events in the Syrian Arab Republic,

countering the authority of Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani and causing formations, breakaways and mergers of various Al-Qaida-aligned groups in Idlib."

In Yemen, the Houthi coup militias, supported by Iran, continue to turn a deaf ear to the calls made by the international community and the United Nations. Their intractable stance makes it clear that they want to prolong the crisis in Yemen. They did not take seriously the invitation made by the United Nations Envoy during the Yemeni peace negotiations held in Geneva last September. They continue to hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance convoys and loot them, lay mines and cut off roads. The coup militias have launched more than 200 rockets targeting residential areas of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Those rockets were manufactured in Iran and brought from Iran. The rocket-launcher operators were also trained in Iran, in breach of all relevant provisions of international law. My country, on the other hand, has been generously delivering assistance to the sisterly Republic of Yemen since 2012 — more than $13 billion so far in all areas, to save lives and maintain the security and prosperity of the people of Yemen.

My country is playing a crucial role in peacefully resolving regional and international crises, in keeping with international conventions and treaties. My country seeks to uphold the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes and undertakes initiatives aimed at the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

A few weeks ago, we witnessed the historic signing of a peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea in the city of Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, sponsored by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and in the presence of Secretary-General António Guterres. We also witnessed the beginning of a reconciliation process between Djibouti and Eritrea, with a historic summit held between the Presidents of the two countries in Jeddah. We hope that the summit will lead to reconciliation between the two neighbouring countries. The Kingdom will continue to work towards maintaining security in the Red Sea basin, enabling it to transform into an oasis of peace, cooperation and prosperity among Arab and African States bordering the basin.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): There was a moment in history when we were all hopeful that there would be peace in Israel and Palestine. That is no longer the case. The hope for a just and lasting settlement has never been lower. However, this gloomy picture could have been avoided. It was not inevitable and is the result of deliberate steps.

We are seeing increasing pressure on the daily lives of Palestinians. Gaza is still under a blockade. Israeli security forces use increasingly excessive force against Palestinian civilians. There are restrictions for the Muslims who want to visit Haram al-Sharif. Recently, we have seen the displacement of Bedouins from Khan Al-Ahmar and the introduction of the Jewish nation-State law, which disregard the basic rights of the Palestinian people. The aim of such measures is to pressure Palestinians into accepting the status quo by enforcing hardship and humiliation.

We are also witnessing systematic efforts to undermine the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. That is an attempt to change the terms of reference of the Middle East conflict and destroy the hope for a two-State solution. We are entitled to our own views but not to our own facts. According to international law, the Palestinians have the right to their own State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That cannot be changed. According to United Nations resolutions, Palestinians have the right to return to their homeland. That cannot be withheld. The refugee status of the people of Palestine is a legitimate right and cannot be used as a bargaining chip. The Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are illegal and cannot be ignored. Those are facts and are based on international law.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the most recent target of the efforts to collectively punish the Palestinians. The services provided by UNRWA are vital to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian refugees and to show that they are not forgotten. The Agency also plays a critical role in the stability of the region. Last month, schools for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children across Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria were reopened. Who is going to benefit if the Palestinians are subjected to more difficulty?

As Chair of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, Turkey is proud to support the Agency's work and

has increased its annual contribution. We have also requested traditional donors to increase their contributions, and we have been working to expand the donor base of UNRWA. During the high-level week, we co-hosted a landmark meeting, during which we mobilized $122 million. We expect all countries to step up and help UNRWA.

It is high time to stand for justice and the protection of the established parameters for a lasting peace in Palestine. The international community must fulfil its moral responsibility. Turkey is ready to do its part.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate, and I thank the briefers for their briefings.

Japan remains committed to supporting a two-State solution. We continue to believe that the most realistic solution to the conflict is two sovereign States living side by side within secure and recognized borders. Lasting peace and security can be achieved only through negotiations between the parties. However, at present, there is little trust between the parties and we do not see momentum towards renewed direct negotiations. Each of us has a role to play in overcoming that impasse.

For our part, Japan is committed to continuing its unique confidence-building measures to create an atmosphere conducive to meaningful negotiations. The role of the United States remains important. The international community must engage with the parties to bring about meaningful peace negotiations towards a solution in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters. Progress will require leadership by both parties. At the same time, we must work to maintain people's faith in the possibility of a political settlement. I would like to highlight three points.

First, the serious economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza needs to be urgently addressed. Japan commends the efforts of Special Coordinator Mladenov and his team in defusing violence and providing economic and humanitarian interventions. We are committed to supporting the implementation of the package agreed at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians. We ask for the support of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to ensure that the people in Gaza will benefit from the package. The return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza is crucial.

Secondly, the continued settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures deprive the Palestinian people of hope and undermine the viability of a two-State solution. Japan once again strongly urges Israel to cease those activities.

Thirdly, we believe that investment in the next generation is important. As Prime Minister Abe mentioned in the general debate last month, we will start a new programme to invite elementary and junior high school teachers from Gaza to Japan each year. With regard to investment in the next generation, the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains important. We are pleased with the tangible outcome of the ministerial meeting held on 27 September, which Foreign Minister Kono co-chaired. During the meeting, Japan announced new assistance to UNRWA of $4.5 million to help with the electricity shortfalls in Gaza, in addition to the assistance already committed to and dispersed this year. Japan is also continuing its long-standing Israel-Palestine youth invitation programme, which marks its twentieth anniversary this year. The international community must stand united to maintain the viability of a long-term political settlement. Japan is ready to enhance its political engagement with both parties.

In Syria, the agreement between Russia and Turkey has brought about a provisional ceasefire in Idlib, which must be made permanent given the threat facing its more than 3 million civilians. Advancement of the political process is fundamental. Japan therefore strongly supports the efforts made by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General De Mistura over the years, especially for the establishment of the constitutional committee. Japan will continue to deliver humanitarian assistance to all Syrians facing difficulties, no matter who controls the area.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Madam President, and your country for the efforts undertaken during your presidency of the Security Council in safeguarding its pivotal role in maintaining international peace and security.

I also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive briefing and for his efforts to achieve progress in the region's peace process.

The Palestinian people continue to suffer as a result of the ongoing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the lack of a political vision for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution. Their human rights continue to be systematically violated and they are deprived of their fundamental rights, in conjunction with dire economic and social conditions, particularly in the Gaza Strip. That has led to a substantial increase in poverty and the denial of the most basic human rights. It highlights the magnitude of the historical injustice being suffered by those people and requires positive international action to end the tragedy.

Jordan underscores the centrality of the Palestinian question and the need to find a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and suffering, which would allow the Palestinian people to enjoy their right to live in freedom and dignity within their own State. Our position on the Palestinian question is resolute and steadfast. Our message to the world is that the injustices suffered by the Palestinians must come to an end so that the brotherly Palestinian people can establish an independent and sovereign State. The two-State solution, in accordance with international law, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, is the only way to end the conflict by establishing an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Hashemite custodianship of Jerusalem's Muslim and Christian holy sites is a solemn responsibility that Jordan is proud to shoulder. My country will spare no effort in withstanding any attempts to change the historical Arab, Islamic and Christian identity of the holy city. The Kingdom condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing Israeli violations and provocations against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Haram al-Sharif. We particularly condemn the provocative incursions by Israeli extremists and settlers into the courtyards of Haram al-Sharif, which are systematically carried out under the protection of the Israeli police. Such actions are condemned and rejected. They violate the sanctity of that sacred place and upsets worshippers and Muslims all over the world. They also violate Israel's obligations as an occupying Power under international law and international humanitarian law, as well as all international conventions and norms that emphasize the need to respect places of worship for all religions.

My country condemns the forced displacement and deportation of the inhabitants of Khan Al-Ahmar as part of an expansionist settlement policy that Israel uses to impose a fait accompli and to undermine the two-State solution, threatening further instability in the region.

The serious financial deficit of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is hampering its ability to provide basic services to millions of refugees and poses a threat to the stability of host communities. That leaves us with two options — either to nurture a positive generation of young people or to leave them prey to the forces of extremism and despair.

Despite the efforts of the international community to reduce the deficit, which stood at $446 million at the beginning of this year and now stands at $64 million, we continue to face that problem at the beginning of each year. We must therefore come up with innovative ideas and constructive initiatives to ensure predictable and sustainable funding for UNRWA so that it can carry out its United Nations mandate, respect the rights of refugees to live in dignity, guarantee the rights of more than 500,000 refugee children to go to school and continue to provide them and their families with vital services.

The Syrian crisis is now entering its eighth year. A political solution remains the only feasible way to guarantee peace and stability in Syria and to maintain its territorial integrity. A political solution must be acceptable to the brotherly Syrian people and meet their aspirations, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We commend the key role of the United Nations in making progress towards a political solution to the crisis in Syria. We refer, in particular, to the statement issued by the small group of the global coalition on Syria, which underscores the importance of forming a constitutional committee without delay and enabling it to start its work on the political process, with the participation of all Syrian stakeholders and under the auspices of the United Nations.

I would also like to congratulate the State of brotherly Iraq on the success of its parliamentary elections and the recent selection of the three presidencies, benefiting Iraq and the region as a whole. I emphasize our

commitment to continuing to cooperate with the new Iraqi Government. My country stood by Iraq as it faced the scourge of terrorism and will continue to do so as the country seeks to rebuild itself, based on our firm belief that the success of Iraq is a success for all and that a united, democratic, safe and secure Iraq is in the interests of its people, the entire region and the world.

The absence of a just solution to the Palestinian question and the continuation of the crisis in Syria, as well as the challenges facing some countries in the region as they seek to consolidate security, stability and reconstruction, are issues that compel us to work harder and to stand unified in order to overcome those difficulties and challenges. Those exceptional circumstances call for a unified strategic vision and the strengthening of our capacity to preserve international peace and security by institutionalizing joint action and translating it into reality.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson: The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to deteriorate and the prospect of a two-State solution for Israel and Palestine continues to be dismantled piece by piece, as mentioned by High Representative Federica Mogherini at the third Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean in Barcelona on 8 October. The European Union (EU) is deeply concerned by the situation in Gaza. Gaza is home to 2 million people who struggle to access basic services, sufficient water and electricity supplies.

In the past few weeks, as living conditions continue to worsen, the ongoing protests and violence at the Gaza border fence, fuelled by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, have intensified and expanded in nature. They have further worsened the already volatile situation in and around the Gaza Strip. The launching of incendiary kites and balloons has now continued for more than half a year. It has caused severe damage in Israeli communities near Gaza and must stop. During the same period, more than 200 Palestinians have been killed and over 21,000 have been injured, most injuries coming from live ammunition and gas inhalation. That raises serious questions about the proportionate use of force, which must be addressed through independent and transparent investigations.

We expect the de facto authorities in Gaza to do their utmost to prevent further escalation. The EU urges all actors concerned to act with the utmost restraint to avoid further loss of life, prevent any escalation, discourage recourse to violence and not exploit the demonstrations for other means. While recalling Israel's right to self-defence, we expect the Israeli authorities to respect the principle of necessity and proportionality in its use of force. Serious questions have arisen about the proportionate use of force, which must be addressed through independent and transparent investigations. The European Union takes note of the fact-finding assessment mechanism established by the Israel Defense Forces to review its own actions and specific incidents that have taken place on the Israeli-Gaza border since 30 March. The facts must also be established regarding reports about violent attacks against Israel under the guise of the protests.

The European Union will continue its support for the work undertaken by Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov. We commend his efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, including the fuel-delivery deal reached last week thanks to his engagement. We call on the parties to cooperate with the Special Coordinator and the wider international community to support him in the operationalization of the proposed humanitarian and economic interventions for Gaza, in continued close coordination with the Palestinian Authority, in order to secure and coordinate, among other things, the provision of lifesaving health care, increase access to clean water and energy supplies, improve the overall economic conditions and promote conditions that enable intra-Palestinian unity. The immediate priority must be to reduce tensions and avoid another conflict in Gaza. The return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip is indispensable if we wish to improve the conditions and humanitarian situation in a sustainable manner.

Additional financial efforts by the international community are needed. But in order to ensure lasting results, a fundamental change in the situation in Gaza is critical. That should include an end to the closure and the full opening of crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. In that light, we welcome the continued opening of the Rafah crossing. In the meantime, the EU will continue to support United Nations and Egyptian efforts towards the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under one single and legitimate Palestinian Authority. The EU will continue to work towards that end with our partners, the Israelis and the Palestinians, regional actors and our partners within the Middle East Quartet. We hope that the

United States peace plan for the Middle East will provide another contribution in that regard.

Indispensable humanitarian assistance must overcome political divisions. Stopping the important activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) could well cause instability and create a vacuum that would only serve the extremists. That is why the EU and its member States have collectively been the largest contributors to UNRWA's budget. We are and will continue to be strong, reliable and predictable supporters of the Agency. Just a few weeks ago the EU increased its financial support to UNRWA by €40 million, raising the total contribution to the Agency to €146 million since the beginning of this year.

In the ministerial meeting that the EU co-chaired along with two EU member States, Sweden and Germany, and other partners on 27 September, participants underlined the importance of fully supporting the ability of UNRWA to implement its mandate effectively, namely, to assist and protect Palestine refugees, while continuing to ensure transparency and accountability in its programmes. Next year will be an even tougher year for UNRWA. In that context we need to stress once again the crucial importance for UNRWA and donors to intensify efforts to put the Agency on a stable financial footing while maintaining a focus on its mandate. We will continue to do our utmost to ensure that UNRWA and its dedicated staff continue to operate until a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the plight of Palestine refugees is finally reached.

Twenty-five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, a just and lasting peace among Israelis and Palestinians is still sorely missing. While the Oslo Accords have not accomplished their overall goal, one of their major achievements is that Palestinian institutions are in place. It is in the interests of both the Palestinians and the Israelis that their stability be preserved.

The EU will continue to urge both parties to refrain from unilateral actions that undermine the relaunching of the negotiations or imperil the viability of the two-State solution. There is no justification for incitement and violence. We follow with great concern the situation on the ground, in particular the pending demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar, including its school, in a location of strategic interest for preserving the contiguity of a future Palestinian State, as well as the decision taken last Sunday by the Israeli authorities to move forward plans for settlement expansion in Hebron. The EU has repeatedly urged Israel not to execute its decision to demolish the Khan Al-Ahmar community or displace its citizens and today reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in that context, including demolitions and confiscation — including some EU-funded projects — evictions and forced transfers. Settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace, and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible.

We must work together to reverse the current negative developments on the ground, which are leading us away from a negotiated two-State solution with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States. A two-State solution based on the 1967 borders that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation, and resolves all final-status issues remains the only viable and realistic way to end the conflict and achieve just and lasting peace. The EU will continue to work towards that end with both parties and its regional and international partners, starting with the Middle East Quartet.

The conflict in Syria has continued for more than seven years and has caused immense suffering. Millions of people have been forced to find refuge in other countries or have faced starvation, sieges and armed offensives within their country, along with blatant and ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, in particular by the Syrian regime. The Syrian regime bears the overwhelming responsibility for the catastrophic humanitarian situation and the suffering of the Syrian people.

The EU acknowledges the signing of the memorandum to establish a ceasefire in Idlib and calls on the Astana guarantors to ensure that that ceasefire is upheld and to safeguard the last remaining de-escalation zone in Syria. The EU expects that they will follow through on their commitment and also guarantee the protection of civilian lives and infrastructure, as well as safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access across Syria.

The EU expresses its full support for the mandate and efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria aimed at establishing a constitutional committee that will serve as the first step towards an inclusive, credible and sustainable political solution in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva

communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). The EU commits itself to remain at the forefront of international efforts for accountability and justice in Syria. All those responsible for breaches of international law and human rights law, some of which may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, must be held accountable. We reiterate our condemnation of the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria by the Syrian regime and Da'esh, as confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. We are deeply concerned by continuing reports by the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic pointing to the use of chemical weapons in various locations in Syria in recent months.

The EU welcomes the recent decision by the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction to enhance the OPCW's capacity to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The EU has imposed restrictive measures on Syrian high-level officials and scientists and has adopted a new global sanctions regime for the use of chemical weapons.

In the meantime, we reiterate our calls upon all the parties to the conflict and those actors with influence over them, especially the Syrian regime and its allies, to ensure unhindered sustained humanitarian access and medical evacuations for all Syrians in need. The situation in Rukban camp is particularly appalling. The EU calls on all stakeholders to facilitate immediate humanitarian access.

The EU supports the rights of Syrians to return to their homes voluntarily and in safety and dignity, in line with international humanitarian law, when conditions allow. The EU calls for safe and equal access to civil documentation on housing and property rights so as to ensure that the rights of Syrians are preserved and that those displaced are provided with the basic conditions to be able to return to their homes in a dignified, safe and voluntary way when conditions allow.

However, the EU agrees with the assessment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that conditions for non-coercive and safe repatriation are not yet in place. It is critical that work undertaken to build those conditions be well coordinated with all relevant actors, in particular UNHCR. The EU will organize a third Brussels conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region in the last week of March 2019, so as to support the United Nations-led political process for a solution to the conflict, provide a platform for the voices of Syrian civil society, and seek pledges by EU member States and international donors.

Finally, the EU reiterates that it will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties to the conflict, on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué, is firmly under way.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Vieira (Brazil): Brazil reiterates its long-standing support for the implementation of the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized and mutually agreed borders based on the 1967 lines, in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the established guidelines of the peace process. At the heart of that formula is the need to work towards the end of the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian State that is fully sovereign, economically viable and territorially contiguous, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In that regard, the expansion of Israeli settlements in Palestine, which are illegal under international law, as well as the incitement and inflammatory rhetoric on both sides, continues to hinder the achievement of a lasting peace in the region. The Brazilian Government maintains its understanding that the final status of the city of Jerusalem should be defined in negotiations between Israel and Palestine on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016).

Brazil remains deeply concerned with the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The escalation of violence over the past few months underscores the urgent need for a political solution to the conflict, which includes inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

The critical financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the effect

that the recurrent underfunding of the Agency has on its ability to address the needs of Palestinian refugees is yet another worrying development in the region. As a member of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA, we underline the vital role the Agency plays in ensuring health, education and other basic services for almost 5.3 million refugees. We call on all parties to abstain from any actions that may jeopardize UNRWA's capacity to fulfil its purpose.

Brazil remains deeply worried about the situation in Syria and welcomes the agreement reached to create a demilitarized zone between opposition and Government forces in the Idlib governorate. We urge all relevant parties to fully comply with this agreement. We also wish to reiterate our full support for the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and the intra-Syrian political negotiations in Geneva. We look forward to the establishment of a constitutional committee in line with the agreements reached in Sochi and reaffirm our support for an inclusive political solution to the Syrian crisis based on the parameters set forth in the relevant Security Council resolutions, namely, resolution 2254 (2015), and taking full advantage of the conditions created by the Astana process. We renew our hope that a political process, mediated by the United Nations and led by the Syrian people, will bring about the end of the war and a peaceful solution to the conflict.

With regard to Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's decision to step down at the end of November, Brazil wishes to thank him for his tireless efforts aimed at promoting conditions for an inclusive and credible political solution to this long-lasting conflict.

The civil war in Yemen, which has entered its fourth year, is currently the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. The Brazilian Government is alarmed by repeated allegations of violations of international humanitarian law in Yemen. Brazil remains gravely concerned about the situation in the port city of Hodeidah and calls on all parties to ensure that the port remains fully operational in order to avoid further humanitarian consequences for the people of Yemen. The only viable path for the future of the country is through a negotiated settlement. Brazil expresses its full support for the plan put forward by Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to relaunch political negotiations and implement confidence-building measures. We urge all parties to fully engage in efforts towards a negotiated solution for the conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Monsignor Grysa (Holy See): The Holy See thanks the Plurinational Republic of Bolivia and its presidency of the Security Council for convening today's open debate on a topic that brings us back to the early days of the United Nations, specifically when, by resolution 181 (II) of 1947, the mandated territory of Palestine was divided into two States, one Jewish, the other Arab. For some 70 years, the Palestinian question has been the topic of a great many reports, debates and resolutions in the Security Council Chamber and in other United Nations organs.

The Holy See has supported the two-State solution from the very beginning, and my delegation reaffirms once again the Holy See's unwavering view that the two-State Solution as the only viable way of fulfilling the aspirations for peaceful coexistence among Israelis and Palestinians alike and the only feasible peace plan that would allow both nations to live side by side within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The facts on the ground, as presented to the Security Council on a monthly basis by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, are a source of persistent grave concern. Leaders on both sides bear the heaviest responsibility in guiding their people in the direction of a mutually agreed resolution to the conflict, rather than leading them into deeper conflict. The Holy See calls on both Israel and Palestine to demonstrate wisdom, responsibility and the political will needed to reach a historic peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of both peoples. Undertaking dialogue with perseverance and good will must replace inflammatory rhetoric, violence and conflict. Innocent civilians must never be the target of terror or inordinate military actions.

The Israeli-Palestinian discord and the intra-Palestinian divisions have also been exacerbated by external forces and the geopolitical interests of other countries. The Holy See therefore wishes to exhort neighbours in the region and other concerned States from outside the region to facilitate and sustain the peace process, instead of obstructing or scuttling it for their own interests.

The Holy See wishes to reaffirm the historic status quo of Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and rejects any unilateral

measure aimed at changing it. At the same time, it calls upon the United Nations to carefully consider the status of Jerusalem as recommended by General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947. My delegation believes that the Holy City should be a place of convergence and peace and that the followers of the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam should be guaranteed free and unhindered access to its holy places. Accordingly, the initial proposal of an international status guaranteed by the United Nations remains of great importance in fulfilling the City's singular calling. Indeed, the Holy City of Jerusalem undoubtedly holds a very special place not only in the hearts of the inhabitants of the city, but also for the followers throughout the world of the three monotheistic religions. May it become truly what its name means: City of Peace.

My delegation notes with great concern the dire humanitarian situation that the Palestine refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are facing. The Agency provides a range of essential support for some 5.6 million registered Palestine refugees, supplying the most basic human needs from housing to education, health care and social services. In a situation that shows no sign of being resolved quickly, a fully functional UNRWA remains the best means to prevent the situation in the region from worsening in a way that would bring both greater cost and likely greater expenditures to the international community.

Like UNRWA, various charitable action groups and organizations of the Catholic Church provide education, health care and social services to Palestine refugees and to Palestinians in general. The Holy See hopes and prays that, sooner rather than later, a fair and durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be reached through the resumption of final-status negotiations aimed at reaching a two-State solution, with Israel and a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Ms. Krisnamurthi (Indonesia): As it appears that today's open debate on Palestine may be the last in the Security Council for this year, I wish to take this opportunity to express the appreciation of the Government of Indonesia to the delegation of Bolivia for its sincere and consistent support for the Palestinian cause during its tenure.

Regrettably, rather than advancing our understanding or making contributions to achieving peace and resolution, this quarterly debate on the Middle East has become a showcase for the occupying Power's illegal activities and violence towards the territory it occupies and the people there, including women and children. We seem to be mere spectators of a series of increasingly disturbing tragedies, without the capacity or perhaps even the conscience to stop them. It seems that we are becoming indifferent and emotionless, ready to treat the situation as commonplace. It seems that at every meeting now we are learning of new and more ambitious illegal settlements, the demolition of houses and property, restrictions and blockades. We hear of the excessive use of force, of arbitrary detentions and other illegalities, which also look like what we have seen in previous reports. The report before us (S/2018/614) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) is yet another. But the truth is that those reports are about people, families and communities. They are about human lives and human beings like us, whose only desire is for a normal, peaceful life, but who are facing those violent acts and denials of their rights every day.

Indonesia must repeat what it has been saying for a long time, which is that the issue of the occupation of Palestine has lasted too long. The responsibility for it belongs to the Council, and we object to any attempts to divert attention from it at this critical time. While we are certainly aware that the Charter of the United Nations does not provide the Council with an enforcement mechanism for ensuring that its decisions are honoured, we are hopeful that the Council realizes that the Palestinians also deserve to live in peace, and that this organ can do far more than it has done so far in that regard.

We reaffirm the principles of the Charter, which set clear parameters for the Council in areas such as the equal rights of States, self-determination, respect for human rights, the non-use of force and territorial integrity. As a strong proponent of multilateralism, Indonesia reiterates that the Council was and is meant to be the main organ not simply for maintaining the principle of world peace, but for preventing the unilateral use of violence by any State against civilians or other States. In effect, it is meant to be a force for peace in the world by being a safeguard against injustice and impunity anywhere in the world.

Indonesia wants to place on the record the continuing carnage by Israeli forces since the Great March of Return protests began in May. At least 198 Palestinians, including 31 children, three people with disabilities, three paramedics and two journalists, have been killed. In addition, more than 20,000 have been injured, some of them with life-changing and paralysing injuries. On 28 September, seven Palestinians, including two children, were killed in one day during the demonstrations, and hundreds were injured. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, those numbers represent the highest fatality toll in a single day since 14 May, when 42 Palestinians were killed. We condemn that senseless violence and support the call for the protection of the Palestinian people, including through the dispatch of an international protection force.

On the question of Syria, we welcome the creation of a demilitarized buffer zone in the governorate of Idlib. It is proof that diplomacy has produced positive progress in the effort to avoid civilian casualties. The protection of civilians must be an absolute priority for all stakeholders, and Indonesia believes that a political settlement through dialogue and negotiation is the best solution.

Finally, with regard to Yemen, Indonesia is concerned about the serious deterioration in the humanitarian situation, and we call on the international community to take swift and concerted action to prevent widespread famine. Steps must be taken to resume a dialogue between the parties to address urgent concerns and make progress towards a political settlement of the conflict.

Let me end by calling on both parties in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, as mandated by resolution 2334 (2016). In our view, that call should also be addressed to other Member States. We need to remind ourselves that our provocative statements or actions will contribute nothing but an escalation of the situation on the ground. We call on Member States to create the conditions necessary for promoting peace and rebuilding trust and confidence. We also hope that the Council will refrain from any double-standard practices that could erode its credibility and authority. We call on it to implement its binding resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which is crucial to the advancement of peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Mr. Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Niang (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to commend Bolivia for the efficacy with which it is guiding the work of the Security Council this month, and for its unwavering support to the Palestinian cause and a two-State solution, as demonstrated throughout its term on the Council and by its recognition of the State of Palestine in 2010.

Today's open debate gives us an opportunity, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to appeal once more to this organ charged with the maintenance of international peace and security to act and redress the ever-deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That is all the more urgent because, 70 years after the Arab-Israeli war and 51 years into the Israeli occupation, we still do not have a clear political horizon for achieving a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the conflict.

The expansion of Israeli settlements, in violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), undermines not only the contiguity of Palestinian territory but also the Palestinian people's basic rights. In addition, the occupying Power has also persisted in its attempts to forcibly displace Palestinian civilians and seize their land. In that regard, we deplore the plans to demolish the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar, a violation of international humanitarian law that has rightly been condemned by major sections of the international community. The Committee also deplores unilateral measures likely to undermine the international consensus on final status issues, including that of Jerusalem.

In a recent report, the World Bank declared the socioeconomic situation on the Gaza Strip to be in "free fall", and that does not take into account the ongoing deterioration of the situation on the humanitarian front, all of which are factors that risk provoking a new military escalation. The Committee therefore calls on all sides to exercise restraint and de-escalate tensions. In that context, while supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its staff, who are often exposed to serious threats, the Committee renews its urgent call to all Member States to continue and step up their

support to the Agency in order to ensure that it has the sufficient, predictable and lasting resources it needs to guarantee the continuity of the vital services it provides to Palestine refugees. The Committee also urges Israel to lift its 11-year blockade of Gaza, and calls for a reconciliation between Palestine's politicians with a view to reunifying their people.

While the international community remains paralysed, the current demonstrations have resulted in many civilian casualties among Palestinians, including children, particularly in Jerusalem and at the Gaza fence. Because we continue to believe firmly that violence can never resolve this conflict, the Committee supports efforts to create an expanded multilateral framework aimed at reviving the peace process on a basis of the long-standing platforms in this area, with a view to arriving at a two-State solution. The Committee believes that as an international community, we must reconsider the way in which we collectively assume our responsibilities with regard to the Charter of the United Nations. In that regard, the daily violations of the 86 Security Council and 705 General Assembly resolutions represent a threat to the credibility of the United Nations and the rule of law.

The high-level week of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session presented a majority of the world's leaders with an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to multilateralism and to stress the central role of the United Nations in resolving the Palestinian question. We are pleased to note that, today, 139 Member States have officially recognized the State of Palestine. The Committee encourages those who have not yet done so, in particular members of the European Union, to follow that trend in order to demonstrate, as they did with the State of Israel, their commitment to international legitimacy and the two-State solution.

The Committee welcomes the adoption of resolution 73/5 by a significant majority of the General Assembly. The resolution provides temporary additional prerogatives to the State of Palestine, which will assume the annual chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China beginning in January 2019. The chairmanship of the Group, which includes of 134 member States, is a further noteworthy testimony to the growing confidence that the international community places in Palestine.

If we want to safeguard our collective action, then we must put our money where our mouth is and put an end to the historic injustice suffered by the Palestinian people and promote the two-State solution, based on the pre-June 1967 borders, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and international law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Molefe (South Africa): South Africa would like to thank Bolivia for organizing this important quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East with a particular focus on the Palestinian/Israeli situation. We would also like to extend our appreciation to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his informative briefing.

South Africa is deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in Palestine, which has been allowed to grow worse as a result of the complete lack of progress in the peace process. At the heart of finding a genuine resolution to the conflict is the need for the parties to come together to decide the most contentious issues between them. That can only be achieved after a process of trust has been built and a genuine commitment to peace has been shown. A resolution on final status issues, including the status of Jerusalem, the fate of Palestinian refugees and Israeli settlements, as well borders and security issues, cannot be imposed by external parties. Peace negotiations are delicate and challenging processes that require that trust and goodwill be developed between the parties in order to be successful. We stress that the fate of the parties to such processes cannot be decided by external actors.

Unfortunately, the expansion of Israeli settlements and the continued military belligerence on the part of the Israeli Defence Force does nothing to create the trust and goodwill needed to move the process forward. It only furthers the negative externalities, such as the perpetuation of the Palestinian refugee crisis.

In that regard, we wish to once again recognize the importance of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has provided crucial socioeconomic assistance to Palestinian refugees for decades. Cuts in the budget of UNRWA threaten the lives of many vulnerable people and undermine any confidence in achieving a resolution to the conflict. Punishing civilians by cutting off humanitarian funding cannot in any way be conceived as moving the peace process forward. By reducing funding, it is almost as if we were insinuating that people chose to live in conditions

such as those. South Africa welcomes recent pledges made to support UNRWA, and it affirms that such humanitarian support creates the conditions that could one day assist the full-fledged self-determination and ultimate prosperity of the Palestinian people.

The vast majority of Palestine's population have lived their entire lifetime under Israeli occupation. For over half a decade, Palestinians have been denied their dignity and fundamental rights to free movement, education, health care and even the right to life. The longer we proceed without progress in the Middle East peace process, the more unmanageable the negative impacts will be, not only for the people of Palestine, but also for the region and the world.

The people of Palestine continue to look to the international community, in particular the United Nations, to help them realize their right to self-determination. After all, we, the United Nations, agreed in 1947 to establish two independent States, the independent State of Israel and the free and independent State of Palestine, living side by side. The State of Israel was established, but 71 years later the Palestinian State is just a dream. We must do all we can to consolidate our solidarity and work towards a just and sustainable solution for the Palestinian people.

South Africa wishes to emphasize the importance of the greater inclusion of women in the peace process, because there is a growing recognition that the activism of women and their leadership accelerate initial peace efforts and that marginalizing women only weakens the prospects for peace. We also acknowledge the role of women's non-violent activism for peace in both societies and believe that those initiatives should be drawn on to create the much needed good will and commitment to boosting the prospects for peace.

It is clear that peace and security throughout the Middle East will not be attained without peace between Israel and Palestine, as it remains a central source of discord and conflict among the diverse peoples of the region. We reaffirm that the responsibility for attaining peace is primarily in the hands of the people of Palestine and Israel. We, as part of the international community, should support and encourage the parties in that endeavour. The international legal framework for those negotiations has been set. They include the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, to name but a few. However, we should also acknowledge that the situation cannot continue as usual and that a much needed impetus is required to get the peace process back on track.

In conclusion, my delegation believes that dialogue and negotiation remain the only way to find a lasting solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, I would like to reiterate my delegation's commitment to continuing to work on this matter within the United Nations and other multilateral forums to seek ways of countering in a fair and equitable manner the threat posed to international peace and security by this conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): I am honoured to address the Security Council on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), for which the Palestinian question has been and remains an issue of foremost concern. It demands priority collective action, including by the Security Council, in accordance with international law, the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, and the fundamental principles of justice and humankind.

This open debate is being held at a critical juncture for the Palestinian cause, which is experiencing unprecedented and existential challenges, particularly owing to the absence of any serious political and legal actions by this body to enforce its standing resolutions aimed at ending Israel's illegal, decades-long foreign occupation and its violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people. The absence of serious accountability and action has deepened the political impasse, exacerbated the humanitarian suffering of the Palestinian people, and created an unsustainable and highly volatile situation.

The OIC cautions that the current political stalemate is neither acceptable nor viable. We believe that the Security Council should not remain an observer while this already fragile situation continues to deteriorate and further destabilize as Israel persists with its unlawful and destructive occupation policies, which are undermining the contiguity and viability of the State of Palestine and jeopardizing the prospects for realizing the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, let alone the fact that Israel's policies and measures constitute flagrant violations of United Nations resolutions and Palestinians' legitimate rights and in many cases amount to war crimes.

The Palestinian question remains a litmus test for our collective resolve to help restore confidence in international law, the international system and the potential to realize peace and justice. The multilateral engagement of the international community, as per the relevant resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), is needed now more than ever to salvage the two-State solution and revive the deadlocked peace process, with a view to achieving a comprehensive solution based on the internationally agreed parameters, including United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The OIC has repeatedly drawn the international community's attention to Israel's colonial policies in occupied East Jerusalem, which continue to illegally alter the character, status and demographic composition of the city and isolate it from its natural Palestinian environs. By the same token, the frequent assaults at Al-Aqsa Mosque and upon Muslim worshippers by Israeli police and settlers continue to aggravate tensions, threatening far-reaching and devastating consequences that would further undermine peace prospects and risk making Jerusalem the capital of hatred, fanaticism and violence instead of the capital of tolerance, coexistence and peace that it must be.

Meanwhile, atrocities and civilian causalities tragically continue to mount as a result of an ongoing brutal Israeli military offensive against the Palestinian people on the besieged Gaza Strip. Attacks on peaceful protesters, including children, continue to be perpetrated before the eyes of the international community. We reiterate our call on the Council to act responsibly to address the crisis and demand the lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade. It is urgent that action be taken to uphold its obligation to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem and the besieged Gaza Strip.

It is painful to observe millions of Palestinian refugees enduring decades of displacement and injustice as Israel continues its denial of their legitimate rights. Their situation is tragically worsening as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) experiences an unprecedented funding crisis that is putting at risk the Agency's indispensable humanitarian and development assistance for the refugees, including its vital education, health, relief and social services programmes, causing deep anxiety and worry and threatening further instability.

We assert, in that regard, that support for UNRWA at this difficult juncture on the part of all international actors is imperative to conveying a message of hope and collective political commitment to the rights and aspirations of Palestine refugees, so as to ensure that their growing needs are adequately met and their right to return, consistent with the relevant resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III), is preserved and respected.

On behalf of the OIC, I reiterate once again our collective call on the international community to render further support for the resilience of the Palestinian people and to act forthwith on the basis of our clear political, legal and moral obligations to redress their plight and enable them to achieve their rights and legitimate national aspirations, including to self-determination and the independence of their sovereign and viable State of Palestine, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the 120 States members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at today's debate.

The situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is critical and clearly unsustainable. In that regard, the States members of the Movement reiterate that the current Israeli occupation and the entire Palestinian-Israeli conflict remain a serious threat to international peace and security and require urgent attention and resolution, in accordance with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions, the Charter of the United Nations, of course, as well as the tools provided by multilateral diplomacy. The Security Council has a clear responsibility. It must uphold its obligations under the Charter and enforce its own resolutions, which are not only the basis for a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict, but are legally binding on all States Members of the Organization.

We also remain committed to contributing to the achievement of a peaceful, just and lasting solution

to the conflict, as reiterated on 26 September, when the Movement's Ministerial Committee on Palestine adopted a public statement on the issue that was unanimously supported by the membership. We also take this opportunity to call for the requisite efforts to be taken and stepped up at the regional and international levels in support of such objectives, the ultimate aim of which is to end the injustice; more than 51 years of the Israeli foreign occupation of Palestine, including East Jerusalem; more than 70 years of the Nakba, which we must remember in all its human dimensions — the disaster and tragedy that befell the Palestinian people in 1948, during which they lost their homeland and the majority of Palestinians were forcibly uprooted from their homes and displaced, becoming refugees. Their suffering continues to this day.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries still considers resolution 2334 (2016) to be the most viable path to peace. It establishes the fundamental requirements and parameters for a just solution, through which the two-State solution would be achieved on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions; the Madrid principles, including the land for peace principle; the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, with a view to ensuring that the Palestinian people are able to enjoy their inalienable rights. The Security Council must insist that resolution 2334 (2016) be respected, in particular by the occupying Power. Similarly, the States members of the Movement reiterate their call for full respect for and the implementation of all other relevant resolutions in that regard, as they will create the necessary conditions to end the occupation, justly resolve the conflict in all its aspects, and make Palestinian-Israeli peace and security possible.

We take this opportunity to note the current deep-seated funding crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and to stress the urgency of providing UNRWA with sustained, predictable and uninterrupted support, in particular following the punitive and unjustified decision of the Government of the United States of America to end its contributions to the Agency. That not only affects the most vulnerable segment of the Palestinian population and undermines the provision of humanitarian assistance and vital development, but also threatens the stability of the entire region. Similarly, we echo UNRWA's statements in expressing concern about the recent and irresponsible announcements made by Israeli authorities about the closure of the Agency's offices in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The situatopm in Gaza remains of great concern to the Movement, in particular the grave humanitarian situation that regrettably, continues to deteriorate on a daily basis. In that regard, we reiterate our call for the complete lifting of the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, which continues to impose untold economic, social and humanitarian suffering on more than 2 million Palestinian children, women and men. It must be emphasized once again that the crisis in Gaza should be addressed in a comprehensive manner, in accordance with international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Bearing in mind that Israel has clearly renounced its obligations as an occupying Power to protect the Palestinian civilian population, in compliance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Movement calls on the international community to ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians on the Gaza Strip and throughout the entire occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, so as to address the deplorable lack of security for the occupied population and prevent the loss of more innocent lives.

In that regard, the States members of the Non-Aligned Movement reiterate their deep concern at the lack of accountability for all of the violations committed by Israel, which fosters impunity and destabilizes the situation on the ground, while reducing the prospects for peace. That is why we reiterate our call for international action, in particular that of the Security Council, in order to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice for their actions and that the violations committed by the occupying Power cease. Israel must fulfil its obligations and responsibilities within the framework of international law.

We stress that failure to provide protection to the Palestinian people will only lead to further escalation of the violence, which will result, tragically, in additional bloodshed, as demonstrated by the numerous deaths and injuries of Palestinian civilians, including children, in recent weeks. We also reiterate our concern that the Security Council has long been unable to fulfil its mandate on this very important issue because of the use of the veto by one of its permanent members.

With regard to the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, we reaffirm that all measures and actions that

Israel, the occupying Power, has taken or may take, such as the illegal decision of 14 December 1981, which sought to change the legal status, physical character and demographic composition of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as Israeli measures to implement its jurisdiction and administration in that area, are null and void, without validity or legal effect. In that regard and in line with our principled position, we demand once again that Israel comply with resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, pursuant to resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its permanent solidarity with the Palestinian people to promote a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We also reaffirm our support for the heroic Palestinian people in their quest for justice and for the achievement of their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including the right to self-determination, freedom and independence in their sovereign and independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

The President (*spoken in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): First and foremost, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I further thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his valuable briefing on this topic.

I am pleased at the outset to begin my statement on an optimistic note by congratulating the Palestinian delegation on having been selected by acclamation, at the ministerial meeting of the Group of 77 in September, to preside over the Group. In addition, the Palestinian delegation was granted the necessary authorization by the General Assembly to represent the Group and speak on its behalf. We hope that that action is a positive omen for the creation of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem, as its capital within 4 June 1967 borders, living side by side with Israel in peace, harmony and coexistence.

However, successive events, tensions and upheavals in the Middle East undermine our optimism. The dire circumstances facing the Palestinian question paint a grim picture. The situation in occupied Palestine is deteriorating day by day because of the Judaization, settlement and repression policies practiced systematically against the Palestinian people by the occupying Power. That will lead to an implosion and to the exacerbation of tye situation. In addition, those actions pose an obstacle to easing the tension and relaunching the peace process, which has been stalled for four years.

The use of force against unarmed civilians has never led to peace, and the sustained settlement policy, in violation of United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), has never led to a resumption of the political process. On the contrary, it has been a source of provocation for Palestinians and the international community. Moreover, the lack of decent living conditions has never helped to create an atmosphere of trust or an environment conducive to relaunching the peace process.

Undermining the recognized legal and historical status of Jerusalem will only push the Palestinian question into the labyrinth of religious conflict. Jerusalem has a special place not only for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but also for believers of the three monotheistic religions. Jerusalem is the first Qibla and the third holy place for more than 1.5 billion Muslims. The city's legal status is inviolable and cannot be modified by any means, pursuant to Security Council resolutions and the international legitimacy.

That is why the Kingdom of Morocco, whose King Mohammed VI is the President of the Al-Quds Committee, underscores the importance of safeguarding the historic, legal and political status of Jerusalem, while reminding the permanent members of the Security Council and the Quartet of their obligation to assume their responsibilities fully in order to prevent any action that could undermine the status of the city or block international efforts aimed settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

His Majesty has therefore, on several occasions, called for the avoidance of any action that could modify the political status of Jerusalem, in particular because it is a final-status issue. The international

community must shoulder its full responsibilities and encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table and relaunch the peace process based on the two-State solution. Otherwise, that solution will remain empty words that can only lead to the spread of violence and hatred. That is what His Majesty said in his message to the participants in the fifth International Conference on Jerusalem, hosted in Rabat from 26 to 28 June under the theme "The Palestinian question after 50 years of occupation and 25 years of Oslo Accord". His Majesty said:

> "The international community must make every effort to pool efforts in order to ensure that the fair and just settlement of the Palestinian question stays at the negotiation table in line with a realistic vision and a clear timetable, based on the existing terms of reference and where the two parties will seriously engage in it and shoulder their responsibilities.

Our support for the Palestinian question is unconditional and ongoing. That was also underlined by His Majesty in his message:

> "We reiterate our commitment to the Palestinian question. Our support is continuous and absolute. It shows solidarity and an irreversible commitment until the Palestinian people are able to recover all their inalienable rights, because those rights are legitimate under international law, where land and history bear witness to that."

To conclude, the position of the Kingdom of Morocco on this conflict remains unchanged. It is based on the Arab Peace Initiative and on the principles and terms of reference with regard to achieving peace on the basis of creating an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 4 June 1967 borders, living side by side with Israel in peace, security and harmony.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We endorse the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Cuba regrets that since the last open debate on this issue (see S/PV.8244), there has been no progress in promoting the just cause of the Palestinian people. On the contrary, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, with arbitrary decisions being made, such as one Member State's decision to stop funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It is deplorable that owing to the repeated obstruction of one of its members, the Security Council has not even condemned the escalation of violence and the tragic events in the Gaza Strip since 30 March.

Cuba reiterates in the strongest terms its rejection of Israel's use of disproportionate and indiscriminate force against Palestinian civilians in the occupied territory, including East Jerusalem and particularly the Gaza Strip, in gross and flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. We once again condemn the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory and the demolition and seizure of Palestinian property. All such measures, together with the blockade of the Gaza Strip, violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and erode the viability of a two-State solution. Cuba urgently reiterates its call on the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council must demand that Israel immediately end its occupation of Palestinian territories and its aggressive colonization policies and practices, as well as abide by the relevant Security Council resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

We reiterate our unreserved support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the establishment of two States and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and an independent and sovereign State, within in the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the right of return of refugees. We reject the unilateral action of the United States establishing its diplomatic representation in the city of Jerusalem, which only exacerbates tensions in the region. We call for support to President Mahmoud Abbas's proposal (see S/PV.8183) to hold an international peace conference, based on agreed parameters and terms of reference. We want to express to the Palestinian Government and people our unwavering solidarity and support for Palestine's admission to the United Nations as a full Member.

Cuba once again calls for Israel's total and unconditional withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and

all occupied Arab territories. We want to point out that any measure or action designed to change the legal, physical and demographic status and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to exercise its jurisdiction and govern that territory, violates international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Lastly, we call for respect for multilateralism and for the Charter. We call for an end to interference in the internal affairs of others, to foreign aggression and support for terrorist groups to promote instability and conflicts in the Middle East, as well as to the invention of pretexts and theories in the Council in an attempt to legitimize the unilateral use of force and aggression against sovereign States.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on Bolivia's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for October, and to wish you every success in your work. We appreciate the holding of this open debate, and we thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his comprehensive briefing. We also thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad for his participation in the meeting this morning.

The unresolved conflicts in the Middle East continue to ensure that the situation there remains critical and unstable. If we do not rely on wisdom and reason and commit to respecting international law and the Charter of the United Nations, we will put peace and security in the region in jeopardy. Those challenges require an environment conducive to addressing them, including the united efforts of all concerned to fight violent extremism and terrorism and tackle their root causes while examining their cultural, social and political backgrounds.

The Palestinian question has been on the agenda of the Security Council for decades, and yet the international community has been unable to settle it. The achievement of such a settlement would have a positive impact on the stability of the region as a whole and on international peace and security. The Palestinian question is the central issue for Arab and Islamic nations. A lasting, just and comprehensive, peace must be based on international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international legitimacy regarding self-determination and the inadmissibility of the annexation of territory by force. That requires meaningful negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties to reach agreement on issues pertaining to a final settlement, based on agreed-on terms of reference, including the Arab Peace Initiative, for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital; ending the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese occupied territory; immediately ceasing all settlement activities; on the return of refugees; acknowledging the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and not changing the status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and other Islamic and Christian holy sites, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque. That would ensure that both parties could live side by side in peace and security.

The unjust blockade of Gaza has entered its eleventh year. The people of Gaza are enduring an agony of suffering from the humanitarian crisis. Based on instructions from His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, we have provided them with $150 million in humanitarian assistance. We have also provided the Gaza Strip with fuel for generating electricity. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) recently celebrated the opening of the new scholastic year, and the State of Qatar has contributed $50 million to the UNRWA educational programme, helping its schools to open on schedule. Those efforts are part of our positive role to foster the stability that peace requires.

The crisis in Syria is having serious repercussions and demands an urgent political settlement based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015), with the full participation of the Syrian people, in order to meet their legitimate aspirations while maintaining Syria's national unity, sovereignty and independence. Until a political transition and national reconciliation are achieved, there must be accountability for crimes under international law and international humanitarian law. We underscore the importance of supporting the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

It is nearly a year and four months since the illegal blockade was imposed on my country, the State of Qatar, in a contrived crisis that seeks to control its will and invalidate its political decisions on fabricated and farcical grounds. That contrived crisis only undermines the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). For more than three decades, that regional entity has been able to maintain its unity. In the light of the crises in the region that require collective action, we must preserve the GCC.

The countries imposing the blockade have not been successful. The State of Qatar has been able to deal with the unprecedented crisis in the Arab Gulf wisely, through an ongoing policy of openness and building bilateral and multilateral partnerships in different areas, despite the campaigns of hatred and deception by the countries of the blockade, which seek to justify their irresponsible actions against the people and residents of the State of Qatar.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the State of Qatar has underscored its commitment to dealing with it in accordance with international law and the relevant existing bilateral and international conventions and agreements on conflict resolution. The State of Qatar therefore reiterates its commitment to the mediation led by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Emir of the sisterly State of Kuwait. We are grateful to the States that have supported us during the mediation to resolve the crisis. We are ready to negotiate without preconditions and in full respect for our sovereignty, as we have reaffirmed time and again in various forums.

In order to find solutions to that contrived crisis, which causes legal and social problems pertaining to family fragmentation and the deprivation of students from the right to study as a result of the unilateral measures imposed by the countries of the blockade, the State of Qatar resorted to the International Court of Justice, which, on 23 July, issued a ruling by adopting provisional measures in favour of the State of Qatar against the United Arab Emirates for violating the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The ruling included provisions that requested the United Arab Emirates to ensure that families were reunited and that the affected Qatari students were given the right to finish their studies in the United Arab Emirates and to receive their educational records. It also gave the affected Qatari citizens access to the judiciary in the United Arab Emirates. That proves the sound legal position of my country.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm that the State of Qatar will continue its foreign policy based on international law, friendly relations and constructive cooperation within the multilateral system. We believe that such an approach is the best way to end all international crises, including those in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abdelaziz (*spoke in Arabic*): This meeting is being held at a critical time. The credibility of the multilateral system is at stake, particularly that of the Security Council as it addresses flagrant violations of international legitimacy and defends the firm and established foundations of the peace process in the Middle East, which is subjected to fierce attack.

The League of Arab States warns against the grave threat to the main principles of the United Nations peace process, in particular the two-State solution, the principle of land for peace and the five final-status issues. All those principles are under fierce attack by unilateral, irresponsible decisions that seek to change the facts on the ground through unilateral actions, without negotiation, in contradiction to established international legitimacy. Such actions attempt to settle the issue of Jerusalem, the most critical final-status issue, in favour of Israel by means of an illegal acknowledgement of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel and the transfer of the United States Embassy to that city. Another example is the ending of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which is an attempt to undermine the will of the defenceless Palestinian refugees to exercise their inalienable right of return to their occupied territories, while resolving the matter of the refugees, which is the second final-status issue, in favour of Israel.

That fierce attack has been exacerbated by the Israeli inhumane practices against the defenceless Palestinian demonstrators since the beginning of the Great March of Return this year, when more than 200 people were martyred and nearly 5,000 injured. Most recently, an Israeli attack claimed the lives of seven martyrs east of Bureij camp in the Gaza Strip. Such practices require decisive action by the Security Council, the Human

Rights Council and the International Criminal Court so as to end Israel's violation of its commitments as the occupying Power in line with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law and human rights law.

We call on the Council to take action in order to implement the Fourth Geneva Convention and the new internationally agreed humanitarian concepts in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly those of the responsibility to protect and human security, which are established foundations for the protection of the Palestinian people from a reckless occupying Power that violates all their rights, including their right to peacefully demonstrate against occupation.

In that regard, the recent report of the Secretary-General submitted at the request of the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly includes alternatives for action. It is a solid foundation for the Security Council to regain the initiative on that important issue and to work with the General Assembly to adopt an effective mechanism that will provide protection in all its forms: physical protection from armed aggression against the defenceless Palestinian people; legal protection in the face of the nation-State law of the Jewish people, which denies the Palestinian people any connection to their historic land; and the protection of Palestinian territory against settlements that contravene resolution 2334 (2016). Israel's action to demolish Khan Al-Ahmar village and other Bedouin communities in order to establish geographic contiguity between East Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Palestine, and the neighbouring Israeli settlements is unacceptable. Holy sites should be protected by addressing attempts by Israel to enact a law that permits Jewish worshippers to pray at the Holy Mosque, which is a flagrant violation of the status of Jerusalem as a symbol of coexistence among faiths.

There is also the issue of providing protection for the Palestinian people in Gaza against the destructive impact of Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, which undermines Egypt's tireless efforts to achieve the desired Palestinian reconciliation.

On 20 February, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas presented to the Council a practical plan for peace through direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, based on the two-State solution, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and other terms of reference that would lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, before the beginning of next year. That should be achieved through negotiations on all final-status issues without exception and without biased external intervention. He reaffirmed the elements of that plan in his speech before the General assembly at the beginning of its seventy-third session.

The League of Arab States looks forward to the Security Council and the General Assembly supporting that plan so that we see the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Hattrem (Norway): I would first like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for their contributions.

We are deeply concerned about the military escalation in Gaza. We condemn the firing of rockets from Gaza towards Israel. All the parties must show restraint and avoid provocations in order to prevent any further escalation of violence. We are also very concerned about the recent attempts we have seen to delay and undermine the speedy and unimpeded implementation of the United Nations package of humanitarian interventions to Gaza, which is important for the people of Gaza and for regional stability. Norway chaired a ministerial meeting in New York on 27 September of the international donor group to Palestine, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), which welcomed the United Nations humanitarian package for Gaza and called for its implementation as a matter of urgency, in coordination with the Palestinian Authority. Norway strongly supports those efforts and will provide additional assistance to the United Nations.

Gaza is on the brink of economic, humanitarian and social collapse. There is an urgent need for improved access to clean water and energy, and for job creation and the freer movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza. Norway will continue to work closely with the United Nations, the European Union and key donors to ensure the full implementation of all the elements of the humanitarian package. To succeed in those joint endeavours, we urge all the parties to

do their utmost to support the international efforts. In that regard, it is crucial for the Palestine Liberation Organization to cooperate with the United Nations and the international community.

Hamas bears a major share of the responsibility for the dire situation in Gaza and must end its provocations and politicking. It is the Palestinian Authority and the international community, not Hamas, that are providing assistance to the people of Gaza. Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority should reinstate its governance in Gaza and reunite Palestine under one authority. In the meantime, however, it is counterproductive to stop supporting Gaza financially and thereby further impoverish the population. For its part, Israel should restart fuel supplies to Gaza, expand the fishing zone and abandon its system of extensive restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza.

The AHLC meeting also called for urgent action to mitigate the risks to the Palestinian economy. A combination of major reductions in donor contributions, significant revenue losses due to fiscal leakage and continued restrictions on Palestinian access and movement has led to a serious decline in the Palestinian economy in 2018. There is a risk of a financial breakdown next year unless we take concerted action to address the fiscal issues, including between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. A viable Palestinian economy is a vital precondition for a two-State solution, and donors must increase their contributions. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains indispensable. The Agency provides essential services to the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees and contributes to regional stability. It is vital that donors remain committed to supporting it.

Recent developments in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, including the decision to demolish the village of Khan Al-Ahmar, are very worrying. The location of Khan Al-Ahmar is strategically important to the preservation of the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. Norway has been a consistent partner in promoting peace and security in the Middle East for decades. Our long-standing commitment to helping to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine is based on our firm support for a negotiated two-State solution, even though today the hurdles seem more difficult to overcome than ever.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am sincerely grateful to the Bolivian presidency of the Council for convening this meeting and would like to warmly congratulate it on Bolivia's exemplary leadership of the Council. I also want to thank today's briefers.

I align myself with the statements delivered earlier by the representatives of Venezuela, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and Bangladesh, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The situation in Palestine continues to deteriorate. In the wake of new Israeli crimes, the number of Palestinian protesters killed is more than 200 and the number of injured more than 22,000. Why are they protesting? They are protesting the systematic violation of their inalienable rights over the past 70 years, the occupation of their land, the decade-long inhumane siege of Gaza, the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital by the United States, the racism shown towards them and its recent legalization in Israeli law, the demolition of their homes and the construction of Israeli settlements.

They want to return to their ancestral lands, their own homes, villages and cities, and to establish their own State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. But why is Israel killing them? It is killing them merely because they are Palestinians, whether they are children, women, farmers or fishermen. Because in Israel's view, Palestinians have no rights — no right to assembly, to expression, to protest, to return, to establish their own State or even to life, and because Israel is addicted to cruelty, crime, death and destruction. With those realities before us, let us review what the Council has done to protect the rights and lives of Palestinians. During the past seven decades, it has adopted more than 300 resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and related issues, the most recent being resolution 2334 (2016). In previous meetings, almost all Council members have said that Israel has violated that resolution. Of course, that is only one of the more than 300 Council resolutions that Israel has violated, and it is the symbol of an international outlaw.

The United States unconditionally shields Israel against any of the Council's measures. One example of that is its veto of 44 of the Council's draft resolutions

on Israel. In practice, the United States has rendered the Council completely ineffective with respect to Israel, which has therefore been emboldened to commit all four of the core international crimes, wage more than 15 wars, occupy Arab countries' territory, invade all of its neighbours without exception, attack other countries in the region and beyond and possess every kind of weapons of mass destruction. The list goes on. The question that is now before us is whether there is any option, besides taking international action, for holding both the United States and Israel accountable for all of their wrongdoing and for depriving Palestinians of their inalienable rights. That is why we believe that the world should continue to support the realization of Palestinian rights and reject any further occupation, aggression, oppression or intimidation.

In order to comply with this meeting's agenda, I have been focusing only on the question of Palestine. We will make a further statement later to respond to the irrelevant claims of the United States representative.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): I would like to thank Bolivia for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It has been more than half a century since the General Assembly recommended a two-State solution with clearly defined borders between the State of Palestine and Israel.

The Council, through resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980) declared the Israeli occupation of Palestine to be illegal;, the annexation of the holy city of Jerusalem to be illegal; and the shifting of the Israeli capital to Jerusalem to be illegal. The Council also declared it illegal for any country to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and therefore any move of its embassy to Jerusalem to be illegal. Through resolution 2334 (2016), the Council called upon Member States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories of Palestine, occupied since 1967, and reaffirmed the illegality of Israeli occupation and settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

And yet, the question of Palestine remains unsettled. As responsible members of the international community, all Member States, especially the key players in the conflict, must uphold the letter and spirit of relevant Council resolutions. The legitimacy of the Council is fundamental to the credibility of the United Nations and the maintenance of international peace and security.

Just last month, Israel's High Court of Justice rejected a petition to prevent the demolition of a village in the West Bank, which would result in the displacement of hundreds of people, leaving them homeless, without a livelihood, without a school for their children and without access to basic health care.

As the people of Palestine continue to live in unjust conditions in their own homes, we have on many occasions heard the international community call upon the people of Palestine to be resilient. If we continue to merely express sentiments instead of holding accountable those responsible for multiple breaches of international law and international humanitarian law, we are masking our own failures and abandoning our own responsibility to the people we claim to help.

The Maldives has always believed that an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 1967 borders, living side by side and in peace and harmony with Israel, is the best and only solution to the conflict. We call on Israel to fully implement the Council's resolutions and to respect its legal obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. We all must act in good faith and respect the international norms that we have forged to sustain peace in the Middle East.

In Syria, we are approaching the end of the seventh year in the conflict and one of the crucial moments in Syria's north-western Idlib province, where an outbreak of conflict would result in the worst humanitarian catastrophe of this century. In such an event, more than 3 million people would be displaced with nowhere to seek shelter or find food or access health care. It is our view that all actors involved in the conflict should prioritize the fundamental human rights of the people affected over and above anything else, and to allow humanitarian relief to reach those who need it most.

The already complex conflicts in the Middle East are being worsened by terrorist groups that are inflicting destruction and tearing the social fabric of society in the process. They do not recognize borders, distinguish between young and old or women and men, or respect any religion or culture. We must tackle the factors enabling terrorism through international cooperation, information-sharing and strategies that focus on combating violent extremism.

The Security Council can and should act to address the conflicts in the Middle East. We urge the Council to use the tools and mechanisms that are already in place within the United Nations system to pursue dialogue and to resolve those conflicts. The Government and the people of the Maldives will always support a peaceful and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and the conflicts in the Middle East.

Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay attaches great importance to the various situations in the Middle East on the Council's agenda.

We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his informative briefing and, as we have highlighted so many times, for his ongoing dedicated work. He can count on Uruguay's support.

Despite the many multilateral, regional and unilateral initiatives to try to end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, we are still far from reaching a peaceful and mutually acceptable solution. The two-State solution remains the only viable option. There is no plan B to replace it. We must return as soon as possible to direct negotiations that can elucidate the outstanding issues. We recognize that this may take time, but it would be worse to remain bogged down in the current paralysis and stagnation. To achieve that goal, the current trends on the ground must be reversed. Otherwise, it will be extremely difficult for Palestine to consolidate its State territory.

Uruguay has strong ties of friendship with both the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. We once again reaffirm the right of Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure and recognized borders in a spirit of renewed cooperation and free from any threat or action that undermines peace. We could dwell on the most recent events — the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip towards Israel and the repression to which it leads or the imminent demolition of the village of Khan Al-Ahmar. We prefer instead to focus today on asking both parties to adopt measures and gestures that would help to de-escalate and alleviate tensions, albeit gradually. In Uruguay's view, such measures include the following.

First, the launching of industrial or homemade rockets from the Gaza Strip must cease, along with any action that can be deemed terrorism against Israeli targets. Second, restraint must be exercised so as to prevent disproportionate repression of demonstrations or protests taking place in the Gaza Strip. Third, the settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territories must be suspended because settlements are illegal under international law. Fourth, demolition orders for Palestinian homes in the West Bank and in east Jerusalem must be suspended. Fifth, the State of Israel must be fully recognized and the blockade of Gaza must end. Sixth, military and civilian prisoners or their remains must be returned to their relatives as a minimum show of humanity in the conflict. Seventh, reconciliation agreements between Fatah and Hamas must be consolidated for the sake of Palestinian unity. Eight and no less important, beyond activism, both sides must be sensitive to the general and urgent needs of the civilian population. Palestinian and Israeli civilians are the majority and they want peace. Unfortunately, political leaders tend to lose sight of that fact. Ninth, the historical, cultural and religious heritage must be preserved in an atmosphere of coexistence. If tolerance reigns, there is room for everyone. Finally, we must work to develop the economic potential of the region and solid avenues of cooperation once the conflict is over.

In conclusion, it is time to begin to move beyond hatred and its incitement, disillusionment, despondency and frustration. Seventy years ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II). It can be said that, thanks to the impetus provided by that international legal action emanating from this Organization, Israel and Palestine have consolidated their identity, rights and obligations as States and as recognized legal entities.

Today as 70 years ago, the international community, which was sensitive and backed that solution, is still eagerly waiting. It is harmful and unhealthy for the leaders to refuse to accept the path that the international community has selected and backed in good faith. Any territorial gain or exercise of misunderstood sovereignty is moot if it is at the expense of peace and prolongs the misery of the peoples who inhabit that region.

Before concluding, I would like to add a brief comment on Syria. Uruguay continues to support the work of the Special Envoy, Mr. Steffan de Mistura, a tireless negotiator who has acted on behalf of all of us. After so many years of a conflict of rare intensity that has brought nothing but death, physical destruction and damage to the social fabric of Syria, the least we can aspire to is the formation of a balanced, inclusive and credible constitutional committee that will lay the

foundation for a new constitution for Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Yánez Loza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, my delegation aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and welcomes the fact that, by a majority vote, Palestine will have the technical capacities to exercise the chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China, for the benefit of not only that consensus-seeking group but of the entire membership.

We thank you, Madam President, for convening this debate. The Security Council's regular meetings on this matter illustrates the importance of keeping this issue on the agendas of the Council and the General Assembly. It also demonstrates the importance that the international community attaches to it and the need to find solutions, for the question of Palestine is a pending responsibility of the international community.

Our delegation thanks the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing. We commend his invaluable efforts in the work carried out with all the parties concerned, in particular with the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Israel, to avoid escalation in Gaza, support reconciliation among Palestinians and address all humanitarian problems.

Likewise, we express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report entitled "Protection of the Palestinian civilian population" (A/ES-10/794), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, of the same title and adopted by the General Assembly in June by an affirmative vote of 120 States. It is worrisome to note that the many protection initiatives that the United Nations is implementing are not enough to address the concerns regarding the protection of the Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation mentioned in Assembly resolution ES-10/20.

Three months ago, during the Council's third quarterly debate on this issue (see S/PV.8316), most Member States expressed deep concern about the grave situation in the Middle East — in particular in the Gaza Strip, which could result in another escalation — and about the need for preventive diplomacy and a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, a need that Member States reaffirmed in General Assembly resolution 72/14, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", which highlights the urgency of salvaging the prospects for realizing the two-State solution of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders, based on the pre-1967 borders. In that regard, Ecuador again urges that we should make tangible progress in advancing a final and just political solution for the parties in the region, based on the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, as the only way to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East.

A humanitarian snapshot of Palestinian victims in the besieged Gaza Strip covering the period 30 March to 4 October and published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs asserts that Gaza

> "has witnessed significant increase in Palestinian casualties in the context of mass demonstrations taking place along Israel's perimeter fence with Gaza and in the context of hostilities. The large number of casualties among unarmed Palestinian demonstrators, including a high percentage of demonstrators hit by live ammunition, has raised concerns about excessive use of force by Israeli troops."

On 2 October, Michael Lynk, an independent human rights expert and Special Rapporteur appointed by the Human Rights Council to monitor and report on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, announced that while protests continue at the Gaza border against Israeli policies, so do deaths and injuries among Palestinian protesters, including children, by Israeli security forces. In that regard, we trust that the independent international commission of inquiry initiated in May by the Human Rights Council will be able to conduct a thorough investigation into the deaths and injuries in Gaza during the past six months.

Year after year the facts do not change: the humanitarian crisis worsens, food insecurity increases, the destruction of infrastructure continues and living conditions deteriorate. The Security Council meets routinely to gain awareness about the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. Each meeting highlights the worsening of the humanitarian situation due to violations of human rights, international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of

the Child. Palestinian children are particularly affected by the arrests and actions to which they are subjected, in contravention of the latter. Israel's adoption of new exclusionary and discriminatory legislation and its continuation of settlement activity allow for a dangerous continuation and increase of this ever-present latent threat to international peace and security.

Ecuador once again reiterates its full adherence to the letter and spirit of the resolutions of the General Assembly that have consistently affirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the Assembly's determination that any actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem are illegal, and therefore null and void and have no validity whatsoever, while also reiterating the Council's call on Israel, the occupying Power, in its resolution 1322 (2000) to abide scrupulously by its obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

Israel's continued expansion into Palestinian territory puts at risk international peace and security as well as the two-State solution, to which the Council is committed. We reiterate that it is imperative and urgent that the Council no longer remain indifferent and that it fulfil its responsibility and work to implement the necessary measures to comply with its own resolutions.

In conclusion, Ecuador stresses the fundamental need to combat impunity for violence in time of conflict in an independent, impartial and effective manner. Even more important, however, is combating the causes of conflicts themselves, for therein lies the possibility for building genuine peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to congratulate the State of Bolivia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October, and we thank the presidency for organizing this debate. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his valuable briefing.

Iraq aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Iraq supports efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East. All stakeholders must play a constructive role in order to resolve differences through negotiations and refrain from taking any unilateral or provocative measures that lead to fuelling violence, religious intolerance and racism. Achieving peace and stability in the Middle East requires a comprehensive policy to address the political, economic and social causes of conflicts through a bold, comprehensive and diplomatic policy to avert ominous predictions of a possible catastrophe in the Middle East.

Iraq has always supported the cause of the Palestinian people and their just struggle for their legitimate rights, and we renew our consistent position vis-à-vis a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, which will be possible only through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State that enjoys full rights, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the Arab Peace Initiative and international legitimacy.

We support the peace plan that President Mahmoud Abbas presented in the Security Council on 20 February (see S/PV.8183), wherein he called on international actors to establish a multilateral international mechanism under the umbrella of the United Nations to sponsor the peace process, and to convene an international conference to relaunch a credible and time-bound peace process.

We welcome the General Assembly resolution on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population (resolution ES-10/20) and the latest report (A/ES-10/794) of the Secretary-General on the subject, which includes enforceable options to protect Palestinian civilians. We urge all States and international organizations to participate in the protection of Palestinian civilians and the establishment of a practical and effective mechanism to implement the resolution.

We call on the international community and the members of the Security Council to guarantee real protection for Palestinian civilians and to implement the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994), which stipulate that the Fourth Geneva Convention is to be applied to the occupied Palestinian territory and that international protection is to be provided to the unarmed Palestinian people. We call on all States parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to shoulder their responsibilities in honouring and implementing the Convention in the occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, by putting an end to Israeli violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We renew our call to Member States that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital to do so as soon as possible in order to invest in peace. Such a practical step would be in line with the long-standing international consensus and the declared commitment of the international community in that regard.

We would like to express our grave concern about recent developments regarding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We reaffirm the need to ensure the Agency's mandate. We appreciate the positions taken by the international community in support of UNRWA's work and thank the countries that have provided financial support to compensate for its deficit. We also appreciate the efforts of countries that host refugees, especially Lebanon and Jordan.

In conclusion, my Government values the efforts of the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov, as well as those Member States seeking to launch comprehensive and lasting peace initiatives. We urge international actors to engage in the peace talks, accelerate the peace process and remove any obstacles hindering a just and comprehensive solution.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I thank the Bolivian presidency of the Security Council for convening this very important debate. I also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Viet Nam is deeply concerned about the ongoing complicated situation in the Middle East, particularly the long-protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine, and the situations in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Afghanistan. We share other Member States' great concern regarding the escalation of tensions two days ago and the deterioration of the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. Cycles of negative developments have once again been hampering hopes for peaceful solutions to the conflicts in the region.

We recognize the tireless efforts of the international community, including those of the United Nations, but we believe that much greater efforts are needed now. We therefore support all efforts by the United Nations, the Middle East Quartet, the League of Arab States and countries of the region to push forward the peace process for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a view to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution that ensures the legitimate interests of all the parties concerned, as well as peace and security for the Middle East. Concerted actions are now needed to resume direct and constructive talks between Israel and Palestine.

Viet Nam reaffirms its unwavering support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State. We firmly believe that the only viable solution is to establish a Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, living side by side with the Israeli State in peace, security and mutual recognition.

We urge all the parties concerned to strictly comply with international law, exercise maximum self-restraint, refrain from violence and foster a favourable environment for dialogue. We call on Israel to halt all settlement construction and take action to protect civilians and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people in Gaza. The relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), must be fully implemented.

With regard to the Syrian situation, Viet Nam welcomes recent positive developments, including the agreement by Israel, Syria and the United Nations to reopen the Quneitra crossing in the Golan Heights and the cooperation between Jordan and Syria to reopen the Jaber-Nasib border crossing. However, we remain concerned about tensions in Syria and call upon all parties to settle disputes through peaceful means. We support efforts to find a political solution in Syria based on the fundamental principles of international laws and the Charter of the United Nations, including the principle of respect for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

The Security Council, with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, should take prompt and effective action to seek peaceful and comprehensive solutions to the conflicts across the region. As a partner for sustainable peace, Viet Nam will continue its efforts to contribute to lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Aini Atan (Malaysia): At the outset, I wish to thank you, Madam President, for convening this important open debate, which allows non-members of the Security Council to express their views on an important issue that currently warrants the urgent attention of the United Nations. I also wish to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for their earlier briefings to the Security Council.

Malaysia associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The situation in Palestine remains dire. A peaceful resolution otothe longest man-made conflict remains elusive. Malaysia condemns, in the strongest terms, the various instances of the excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and in particular in the Gaza Strip. If left unaddressed, the growing tension in the Gaza Strip in recent weeks could certainly lead to greater chaos and turmoil in the region. In that regard, Malaysia calls on the parties concerned in the region to exercise restraint and make every effort to de-escalate tensions.

Malaysia also calls on all delegations here in the Council Chamber today, as well as the international community at large, to demand that Israel stop all violations and illegal activities and fully comply with all its obligations as prescribed by the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), as well as in line with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Malaysia is confident that States Members of the United Nations can make a significant contribution to breaking the impasse in the Middle East peace process. Malaysia continues to believe that a two-State solution, with the Palestinians and the Israelis living side by side in peace, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, is the only viable solution to this long-standing conflict.

For its part, Malaysia will continue to provide assistance to the Palestinians, within its means. We continue to reaffirm our unwavering support for and solidarity with the Palestinian cause in materializing their right to self-determination, freedom and independence. Malaysia will work closely with the international community and multi-stakeholders in finding a peaceful, just, sustainable and lasting solution to this long-standing issue.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Oman.

Mr. Al Towaiya (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): First and foremost, allow me, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, to extend to you, Madam President, my sincere thanks and appreciation for having convened this important meeting. I wish also to congratulate you on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

Although our Arab region is experiencing political crises, the Palestinian question, which has been going on for 70 years, remains the central issue in the region. Resolving it in a fair and lasting way will bring security and stability to that region.

The Charter of the United Nations prohibits and rejects the conquest of land by force. That is the principle on which the Arab countries based themselves when, during their summit held in Beirut in 2002, they adopted the Arab Peace Initiative, which is underpinned by the principle of land for peace and the withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territories occupied since 1967. In addition, the Arab countries have spared no effort in international and regional forums to mobilize support for achieving the two-State solution, within the borders of 4 June 1967, and to ensure that a just peace prevails, in which no inequitable solution is imposed on the Palestinian people, who are under the yoke of occupation.

However, Israeli intransigence, procrastination and evasion have not led to the desired solution to this issue or to ending the conflict. Israel offers only one alternative, namely, continue with the occupation, consolidate colonization and violate Palestinian sovereignty.

We reiterate that resolution 2334 (2016) represents a step in the right direction for ending the Israeli occupation and its settlement project, rejecting violence and establishing peace based on the two-State solution. That is why the international community must now undertake efforts and take the measures necessary to implement that resolution. The international

community must also bring pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to abandon its settlement project.

We underscore the Arab position calling for the full lifting of the Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, while promptly achieving Palestinian reconciliation in line with the document signed in Cairo last year. In that connection, we reaffirm our support for the efforts of our brothers in the Arab Republic of Egypt to ensure Palestinian reconciliation.

In keeping with the provisions of international law and United Nations resolutions on the Palestinian question, the Arab Group calls on the Security Council and its member States to take the following measures: first, to not recognize any unilateral action aimed at undermining the two-State solution, including any action affecting the character, status or demographic composition of Jerusalem, and to ensure that such actions are null and void and have no legal impact; secondly, to call once again on States to refrain from setting up diplomatic missions in Jerusalem, in line with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions; thirdly, to reiterate that the questions of Jerusalem and refugees are final-status issues that must be addressed through negotiations between the parties on the basis of international legitimacy resolutions; and, fourthly, to step up international and regional efforts to bring about a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East by creating an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with international legitimacy resolutions.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is currently facing a critical situation. That is why I take this opportunity to highly commend the lofty humanitarian work done by UNRWA to assist more than 5.4 million Palestinian refugees, including children, women and young people, by providing relief and development services in the areas of health care, nutrition, infrastructure and education.

The Arab Group rejects any attempts to nullify the refugee issue or to remove it from the international agenda.

In conclusion, let me say that there can be no stability and peace in the region as long as the Israeli occupation of Arab territories continues. We must assist the Palestinians and save them from despair, because the international Organization is unable to end their suffering and ensure them their rights so that they can realize their legitimate aspirations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Carazo (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Madam President, we congratulate you and the Permanent Mission of the Plurinational State of Bolivia on your outstanding presidency of the Security Council during the month of October.

Millions of human beings live day by day in pain, suffering and despair as a result of armed conflict. Costa Rica strongly deplores the escalation of the conflicts in the Middle East. The situation in recent years and months has deteriorated, and it has not been possible to achieve peace and security in the region. It is urgent to put an end to the humanitarian crisis in some parts of the region and to seek an early and peaceful solution thereto. That humanitarian crisis is a tragedy of shocking proportions that represents an affront to humanity. We therefore once again call on the Security Council to fully discharge its mandate to uphold international peace and security, as clearly set out in the Charter of the United Nations.

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Costa Rica strongly supports the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders and in line with the agreements reached by the parties. We believe that remains the only viable solution. The resolutions of the Security Council are binding and must be implemented. The implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) is key to making progress towards achieving peace.

This year has been a painful reminder of the devastating consequences of protracted conflicts. Costa Rica expresses its grave concern and condemns the escalation of tensions, clashes and, above all, deaths. Acts of violence, incitement and provocations by both sides must cease. They must meet their obligation to reverse all those negative trends on the ground in order to build trust and foster a climate conducive to peace. The protection of the civilian population is imperative.

Costa Rica reiterates its condemnation of settlement activities and land grabs, as well as announcements of new construction. All attempts must cease, including plans to demolish Khan Al-Ahmar and forcefully displace the population. Such actions, as Costa Rica sees it, are contrary to international law and undermine the solution based on the peaceful coexistence of two

States. Each new settlement that is built in the occupied territories is a new obstacle that stands in the way that leads to peace.

Allow me to refer to the protracted situation in Gaza, which has deteriorated rapidly in the past few months. Poverty and unemployment have increased. According to the report submitted to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians on 27 September, poverty increased from 39 per cent in 2011 to 53 per cent in 2017. In the second quarter of 2018, the unemployment rate in the Strip exceeded 53 per cent.

We are convinced that there is a close link between the socioeconomic situation and the humanitarian reality, which is aggravated by the unprecedented funding crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In Gaza, the Agency provides access to primary health care for 1.3 million people, access to education for more than a quarter of a million children and food assistance to almost 1 million refugees living in poverty.

It is therefore important to emphasize the commendable work being done by the Agency, and while my country is concerned about the severe financial cuts to which it has been subject, the response of the international community has been exemplary. Costa Rica applauds the ministerial meeting held in New York on 27 September, which sought to mobilize political and financial support for the Agency. Similarly, my country welcomes the support of the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and UN-Women, among others, which are implementing economic assistance programmes to promote employment opportunities focused mainly on women and young people in Palestine.

I conclude by urging that we put into practice the principles of multilateralism, which prioritize solidarity, peace among rivals and the commitment to achieve the interest of the entire international community. The United Nations must play its role as the epicentre of global governance, based on respect and the joint search for solutions. At this critical juncture, it is imperative to renew international and regional efforts to help the parties achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on the long-standing terms of reference endorsed by the Council. Military options are not solutions. War cannot be fought with more war. Peace must be built with the use of tools that diplomacy, multilateralism and peace education offer us to end that humanitarian tragedy.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel to make a further statement.

Mr. Bourgel (Israel): I have asked for the floor to comment on some of the remarks made here earlier today, and I will do my best to be brief, which I am sure that you, Madam, will appreciate after so many hours in the Chair.

With regard to the comment made by the representative of Iran, it is worthwhile to remind Member States of exactly who was talking. The Islamic Republic of Iran is the world's leading State-sponsor of terrorism. It spends approximately $7 billion each year funding its proxies and terrorist organizations, at the expense of its own citizens. Iranian-made and Iranian-supplied weapons are fuelling conflicts and promoting terror around the world, especially in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Iran's activities violate multiple Security Council resolutions. Iran was also recently caught trying to murder European citizens on European soil.

When it comes to Israel, Iran's end goal is undeniable. The Supreme Leader of Iran himself set a timetable of 25 years until the destruction of my country. It is the moral obligation of the international community to take concrete actions against those who insist on fuelling violence, promoting terrorism and doing their utmost to undermine global peace and security.

It is, perhaps, a vain exercise to respond to the elucubrations of the representative of the Syrian regime. Therefore, I will just mention that his absurd accusations against Israel will certainly not distract the world from the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime against its own people.

It was probably also surprising to hear the Lebanese representative lecture Israel while Hizbullah, an internationally designated terrorist organization, plays an open, active and prominent role in the Lebanese Government. The result is that over 100,000 rockets are on the northern border of Israel, as Hizbullah's fanatics threaten the stability of the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to make a further statement.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): The United States has again abused this Council's agenda. It focused on Iran's children. That is not surprising. Like its addiction to imposing sanctions, America is addicted to disinformation, fabrication and deception. In doing so, it has tried to cover up its own shameless, illegal acts against the Palestinians, including recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and to distract attention from Israel's crimes, including its brutal killing of Palestinian children. But the bullets and bombs that kill them are either directly supplied or funded by the United States. Therefore, that country is an accomplice in all crimes committed by Israel.

With respect to Iranian children, the United States representative portrayed herself as more royalist than the king, but what is the truth? Hundreds of Iranian children were killed by Saddam's chemical weapons, which were mostly supplied by the United States. Hundreds of Iranian children were killed by the Mujahidin-e Khalq Organization, a fundamentalist organization that was de-listed by America and Iraq as the United States as its safe haven.

In 1988, the American forces in the Persian Gulf deliberately targeted an Iranian civil aircraft and killed all 290 people on board, of whom 66 were children. The United States illegal sanctions hurt and harm children more than others. That is how they help Iranian children. Recently, the International Court of Justice ordered the United States to remove all such sanctions. They must implement that ruling.

My last point is that the kingdom of terror, Saudi Arabia, is not eligible to talk about "our islands" in the Persian Gulf. Yes, it is the "Persian Gulf" and not any other fake name. Instead, the Saudis should stop exporting terrorists to Syria and elsewhere, killing Yemeni children in school buses and targeting wedding ceremonies, and end Yemen's occupation.

Last but not least, I salute Hossein Fahmideh, my hero and the hero of all Iranians, from the Council Chamber.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8376

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8376th meeting
Friday, 19 October 2018, 10 a..m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Cordova Soria	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2018/866)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2018/866)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Mali to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/866, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to brief the members of the Security Council on the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2018/866), and to inform them of the latest political, security and humanitarian developments in the country.

The past three months were marked by the holding of a presidential election, which, as acknowledged by all election observers, took place in a generally peaceful atmosphere. I commend Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga on his efforts to promote constructive political dialogue throughout the process. I also congratulate our colleague the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali, Mr. Annadif, whose good offices played a crucial role in easing tensions.

The successful holding of the elections demonstrated the political maturity of the Malian people and the commitment of the political class to the democratic process. In a particularly volatile security environment, the successful organization of the election also highlighted an important achievement of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali — the consensus reached among the signatories to the Agreement, as reflected in the vital role played by signatory armed groups in providing security at several election sites in the north of the country. Such consensus was undoubtedly the key factor that enabled the election to be held according to the electoral calendar and without major security incidents, despite reports of unrest in the centre of the country.

At the same time, the holding of the elections should have been underpinned by further progress in the implementation of key institutional reforms, including the operationalization of interim authorities, constitutional reform, security sector reform and the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process. In addition, the important role the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was forced to play in providing security at election sites has highlighted the low level of operationalization of the various Operational Coordination Mechanism units. Delays in implementing the Agreement, along with certain crucial but stagnant initiatives to strengthen political dialogue, such as the charter for peace and national reconciliation, have also resulted in a lack of national cohesion, underscored by a fragmented political landscape. Differences in the electoral law and electoral register have also increased the number of opposition challenges to the results.

I remain convinced that ongoing discussions for a possible postponement of the parliamentary elections will create a climate of consensus for successful constitutional review and electoral governance reforms. The elections will serve as a new litmus test of the cohesion of Mali's political class and society and as an important step towards the consolidation of democratic institutions. I therefore urge the Government and the opposition to engage in constructive political dialogue, based on inclusiveness and bearing national interests in mind. I also encourage Malian political actors to take the opportunity afforded by the presidential elections to build a more representative Parliament by promoting young people and women as candidates. In that regard, I welcome the composition of the new Government, which, in keeping with Malian law, is now more than 30 per cent female.

The pact for peace, as requested by the Security Council in resolution 2423 (2018) and signed on 15 October by the Government and the United Nations at the meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, is an essential tool to spur the efforts of the Malian parties, supported by the international community, to

implement the Agreement and give new impetus to the peace process by focusing on inclusiveness. The pact does not replace the peace agreement. It underlines the importance of implementing the main provisions of the agreement, as stipulated in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the resolution and in the road map adopted by the parties on 22 March.

Progress on the implementation of the pact, as well as on the key provisions of the agreement, will be brought to the attention of the Security Council six months after the inauguration of the President of the Republic. If no progress has been made, those elements, supported by the work of the independent observer, will provide a solid basis for considering appropriate measures, if necessary. In that regard, I welcome the convening of the high-level meeting on Mali and the Sahel on 26 September on the sidelines of the general debate of the General Assembly here in New York, which enabled us to reaffirm the key role played by the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, including in response to the challenges that have arisen in the centre of the country. It was also an opportunity to highlight the complementarity of the political response in Mali, the support provided to the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), and the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

At the same time, I was encouraged during my visit to Mali by the willingness of all parties to the agreement to accelerate its implementation. The creation of a ministry that is specifically responsible for the implementation of the Agreement, headed by Mr. Lassine Bouaré, is also a sign of the Government's strong commitment to pursuing that goal.

I would like to express to the Security Council my extreme concern about the security situation in Mali, especially in the centre of the country — a region in which, during the two rounds of the presidential election, almost 80 per cent of the polling stations affected by a lack of security were concentrated. The Secretary-General notes in his latest report that that three-month period was the deadliest since the establishment of MINUSMA in 2013. Some 287 civilians were killed in targeted attacks, including by improvised explosive devices or mines and intercommunity clashes between armed self-defence or violent extremist groups.

That situation continues to restrict the access of humanitarian actors to those who are most vulnerable and to limit the scope of action in terms of development interventions. In addition to exacerbating the situation with regard to humanitarian development in the country, as well as human rights, it could perpetuate a sense of frustration in the Malian population, which is struggling to see the concrete benefits of the agreement's implementation materialize. The restoration and extension of State authority must, therefore, be a priority in order to contribute to the delivery of concrete and measurable peace dividends on the ground.

In that regard, as requested by the Security Council in resolution 2423 (2018), MINUSMA and the United Nations country team have begun developing a comprehensive strategic framework in support of the Malian Government's comprehensive security plan for the central regions. That framework will enable them to coordinate their actions in support of governance, peace and stabilization in order to improve their impact on the ground in a comprehensive way.

(*spoke in English*)

Over the past few months, we have also been witnessing an intensification in violent extremist attacks in neighbouring Burkina Faso. Insecurity is spreading fast, across and inside borders, with consequences ranging from the forced displacement of local communities to the erosion of State authority and the sharply diminished delivery of basic social services. That dire situation threatens not only the security of the peoples of Mali and the Sahel, but international security as a whole. We are all running against the clock.

In that context, the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, for which the Secretary-General continues to provide his steadfast support, remains as relevant as ever. What is needed is a regionally driven solution to address instability in Mali and the region, which must be complemented by initiatives aimed at improving governance, resilience and development. Yet, if the Joint Force is to achieve any positive results in its fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime, it will require sustained and appropriate support from its international partners.

Moreover, given the inter-operability and complementarity of the Joint Force with MINUSMA, it will be important to continue evaluating the impact of the Mission over and against the progressive operationalization of the Joint Force. That is an aspect that will be reflected in the six-month progress report requested by the Security Council to be submitted in March 2019.

Before concluding my remarks, I wish to draw the Council's attention to a more hopeful sign in the midst of this challenging situation. We are indeed pleased to report that the past months have shown a consistent and marked decline in the number of peacekeepers killed or injured, despite sustained attacks by violent extremist groups. At this stage, while we should not attribute that decline — at least not exclusively — to the impact of the implementation of the recommendations of the report of retired Lieutenant General Santos Cruz, entitled *Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers*, this is, of course, an encouraging trend. However, we must, of course, remain cautious; we do not know what tomorrow will bring. We will certainly continue our efforts to change mindsets and improve training and equipment, so that our peacekeepers can continue to deliver the Mission's mandate in the best possible conditions for their security and effectiveness.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his very enlightening briefing. I also welcome the highly appreciated presence of Ambassador Konfourou in the Council, who will deliver a statement on behalf of Mali.

I wish to begin my statement by conveying our wishes for a speedy recovery to the five Chadian soldiers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) who were seriously injured when their vehicle passed over an explosive device yesterday in northern Mali. I also pay tribute to the memory of Corporal Abdelatif Rafik, who died under accidental circumstances on Wednesday in Gao during Operation Barkhane. His death brings the number of French soldiers who have died in Mali since 2013 to 23. Finally, our thoughts go out to all the Malian and regional soldiers and MINUSMA Blue Helmets who have lost their lives in recent months while combating terrorism and promoting peace in Mali and the Sahel. Their sacrifice must be heeded by all of us in our reflections on our obligations.

The election that led to the reappointment of President Keita was an important moment in Malian democratic life. I wish to commend the decisive role played by MINUSMA, both through its good offices and its logistical and security support, to ensure that the election was conducted in satisfactory conditions, as has been acknowledged by the Council and all observers present on the ground. It is now essential that all Malian political actors move forward, recognizing the results of the election and working together for the stabilization of the country. The announced postponement of the legislative elections for a few months, following a favourable opinion on the part of the Constitutional Court, is also welcome. That should make it possible to implement, in the meantime, several institutional reforms that will have a direct impact on those elections.

The implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali must remain the top priority. The signing of the pact for peace, just a few months after the adoption of resolution 2423 (2018), is good news. That document notes, in particular, the commitment of all Malian parties and international actors to the swift, full and inclusive work of implementing the agreement. It is now up to us to support that dynamic by mobilizing all of the tools available to the international community to encourage the parties to move forward. In particular, we hope that the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) concerning Mali will continue its work in the coming weeks by visiting the country itself, which will enable it to make contact with all of the Malian parties, as well as with various international mediation actors. In that regard, I would like to commend the work carried out by Sweden as Chair of that Committee.

But let us make no mistake — there is still much progress that needs to be made, and urgently. Resolution 2423 (2018) provides a clear framework in that regard by defining a list of priority measures resulting from the road map agreed by the Malian parties. Its implementation will be examined in a report of the Secretary-General to be submitted every six months once the Malian President assumes power. That period has already begun and merits our full engagement. It is necessary that we act now.

The past few weeks have witnessed the start of a positive dynamic that we must welcome, encourage and strengthen. I am referring in particular to the announcement of the upcoming launch of an accelerated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for Operational Coordination Mechanism combatants, the ongoing finalization of the northern regions development zone, the granting of greater

roles for women within the new Government, and the establishment of a weekly consultation framework among the various Malian parties under the leadership of Minister Lassine Bouaré. Those are all indications that illustrate for us the will of the parties to step up the pace of the implementation of the Agreement. Continued progress is clearly needed, especially with regard to the institutional component and the areas of justice and reconciliation. Once again, however, a positive dynamic has been initiated, and it is essential that it bear results in the coming weeks.

As the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations recalled earlier, the continuing deterioration of the situation in the centre of the country continues to be of great concern to us. The attacks of recent days illustrate the gravity of the threat weighing on that part of Mali and, more generally, the Liptako-Gourma region. We commend the actions taken by the Prime Minister in addressing that issue and his recent visits to the region to encourage the return of a State presence and authority in the centre. It is imperative that the international community fully support those efforts so that the Malian State has the necessary additional resources at its disposal to regain control of the centre.

The redeployment of the Malian armed forces in that area is one part of the equation. Tools have been put in place in MINUSMA's mandate to support that undertaking since June 2017. It is important that the Malian authorities and the Mission make better use of them. We also expect MINUSMA to continue to implement the new directions in its mandate with regard to the protection of civilians with the means at their disposal, while avoiding compromising the strategic priority of supporting the implementation of the agreement.

France emphasizes the fact that the stabilization of Mali and the region can be achieved only through the complementary and coordinated action of the various security forces on the ground, which all share the same goal of supporting the implementation of the Agreement. The support provided by Operation Barkhane to the Malian armed forces within the framework of a counter-terrorist operation within the three-border region this week exemplifies the advantages of such an approach based on partnerships. On another level, the same applies to the operational and logistical support regularly shared among the various actors. Resolution 2423 (2018) sent a clear message in that regard, according to which each entity must play its individual role within the limits of its mandate, but all must coordinate and support one another on the ground in the prevailing difficult circumstances. Let us not forget that the enemies of peace have not waited for us to begin cooperating among themselves.

As we collectively expressed in the adoption of resolution 2423 (2018), the urgency now lies with the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation. The six-month period for implementing the priority measures identified by the Council has begun. The Malian parties must now concentrate all their energies to that end. France will issue a press statement to that effect at the end of this meeting.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): First of all, my delegation echoes the expression of sympathy and condolences that the representative of France offered at the beginning of his statement.

My delegation welcomes the holding of this briefing on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his comprehensive presentation of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/866) on the latest developments in the political, security and humanitarian situation in Mali.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomed the peaceful holding of the presidential elections on 29 July and 12 August in Mali, which saw the re-election of the President, His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. As rightly pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, those elections have demonstrated the profound aspirations of the Malian people for peace, as well as the coming of age of the political class throughout each stage of the electoral process. Côte d'Ivoire notes with satisfaction that the much-feared violence by armed groups was avoided and did not affect the inclusivity or credibility of the elections, particularly in the north and centre of the country. We note the decision of the Malian authorities, together with the Malian political class, to postpone the legislative elections, which were initially scheduled for late 2018, and we encourage them to ensure the holding of those elections as soon as possible so as to complete the electoral process, which will ensure peace and stability.

In order to maintain the positive momentum, Côte d'Ivoire once again urges the Malian Government and all political actors to work more effectively, while overlooking their differences, to preserve peace and

stability in Mali. In that regard, my country welcomes the 15 October signing of the pact for peace between the Government of Mali and the United Nations, in accordance with resolution 2423 (2018). The pact aims to give a new impetus to the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Paragraph 7 of the pact stipulates that decisions reached through international mediation are binding, thereby strengthening the role of international actors, including the United Nations. In that regard, my country encourages the international actors to pursue their multifaceted assistance so as to achieve peace and stability in Mali despite persistent difficulties.

Côte d'Ivoire also commends the efforts of the Government of Mali with regard to the political and institutional measures undertaken, including the re-establishment of the Malian Administration. Those efforts were realized through the appointment of interim authorities in 21 districts of the five northern regions, the progressive operationalization of the mixed units of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in the regions of Kidal and Timbuktu, and the adoption of the national security-sector reform strategy. My delegation also calls for the finalization of the vision for the reconstitution of a new army and of the territorial police, with a view to ensuring the improved protection of the civilian population in the north and centre of the country.

Côte d'Ivoire notes with concern, however, the Secretary-General's observations concerning the persistence of security incidents in central Mali. My country believes that it is urgent to respond expeditiously and appropriately to intercommunal violence and allegations of abuse attributed to members of the Malian armed forces. To that end, the implementation of the integrated security plan for the central regions should be supported by multifaceted initiatives aimed at strengthening governance, development and, above all, reconciliation among communities.

To date, MINUSMA is a key pillar of the current security apparatus in Mali and the region. Working in complementarity with the various forces on the ground, namely, the Malian armed forces, Operation Barkhane, the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and the European missions, provides an added value in combating insecurity and terrorism in Mali. It is therefore imperative to strengthen the operational capabilities of MINUSMA in order to enable it to react and even predict attacks effectively on its civilian and military personnel and to continue to support the Malian armed forces.

The worrying spread of terrorist attacks into certain neighbouring countries is a stark reminder that combating terrorism and organized cross-border crime is a regional security issue that requires the coordinated efforts of all regional and international actors. Côte d'Ivoire therefore welcomes the unity of the Council and the international community's consistent support for MINUSMA and the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. It also welcomes the commitment of all bilateral and multilateral partners that are working tirelessly to restore and consolidate peace and stability in Mali and the subregion.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call on the parties concerned to work towards providing basic social services and the operationalization of programmes to combat poverty and unemployment, particularly in the northern part of Mali and the Sahel, which are recruitment and breeding grounds for terrorist movements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for today's briefing.

Implementing the mandate of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is an incredibly challenging task. A large part of that mandate — with a force of more than 12,000 personnel in a country the size of Mali — takes the right leader, and MINUSMA found that leader in Major General Jean-Paul Deconinck. He completed his command on 2 October, and we are grateful for his leadership during his time as Force Commander. We welcome the new Force Commander of MINUSMA, Lieutenant General Dennis Gyllensporre, and thank him for his commitment in taking on such a challenging assignment. Most importantly, we want to thank the soldiers, police and civilians of MINUSMA, who risk their lives every day to support the Mission in Mali. That includes the latest troop-contributing countries, Canada and Jordan. The United States is grateful to all troop contributors to the Mission, and we honour their collective commitments and sacrifices to the effort to stabilize Mali. We also commend MINUSMA's efforts this past summer in supporting the presidential elections.

We are concerned, however, by reports of some troop-contributing countries not being deployed with all the equipment that they had committed to bringing. That heightens the risk to their units and to the overall

Mission, and we call on troop-contributing countries to follow through on their equipment commitments. We share the Secretary-General's view regarding the political progress made in Mali since MINUSMA's mandate renewal in June. The pact for peace, which was finalized this week, the completion of the presidential elections and the establishment of President Keita's Government provide cause for some cautious optimism in reinvigorating the peace process. But the work must not stop here. The Government of Mali and the signatory parties must use that momentum to make clear and swift gains in implementing the key provisions of the road map.

Increased reports of violent extremist attacks against MINUSMA peacekeepers, Malian and international security forces, and especially civilians, as well as the growing humanitarian crisis in the centre of Mali, are extremely unsettling. The heartbreaking story this week from the village of Telly that gunmen had killed approximately a dozen civilians reminds us of the urgency of finding an enduring solution. This year's mandate asked MINUSMA to continue to support the Government of Mali in stabilizing key population centres in the north, centre and other areas where civilians are at risk. We call on the Government and the Mission to protect civilians and strengthen community outreach mechanisms so as to end the intercommunal violence that is propagated by self-proclaimed self-defence groups. We also call on the Malian forces to respect human rights and comply with applicable international law in all aspects of operations, and we urge the Government to continue to pursue accountability for those responsible for past human rights violations and abuses.

Council resolution 2423 (2018) is clear — signatory parties must show significant progress or face changes to MINUSMA after the expiration of its current mandate. We implore all parties to take that timeline seriously and show the world their commitment to a peaceful and stable Mali through the rapid implementation of the key provisions of the road map stipulated in this year's mandate.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): Let me begin by thanking the Permanent Representative of Mali, Ambassador Konfourou, for joining the discussions today, and let me also thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his informative briefing.

We recognize recent progress in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and particularly welcome the signing of the pact for peace in Bamako earlier this week. It is now important that the parties redouble their efforts to carry out key reforms, as outlined by the pact and resolution 2423 (2018). The reforms relating to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as to decentralization and security-sector reform, the rule of law, social cohesion and socioeconomic development, should now be taken forward without any delay. It is also important that the mixed patrols of the Operational Coordination Mechanism be able to begin patrolling and that regional and local interim authorities be made fully operational. The Council and other partners should continue to support the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation through established mechanisms. We call on all parties to take full advantage of that support, including the independent observer and the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) concerning Mali. As Chair of that Committee, Ambassador Skoog plans to visit Mali later this year.

Inclusivity is essential for long-term stability. We therefore welcome the commitment in the Pact for Peace to seeking an inclusive approach to the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation. We hope that the Government will translate that commitment into further action without delay. As underlined by the Council in resolution 2423 (2018), the parties should ensure the full and equal participation of women in the peace process, including through the greater representation of women in the mechanisms established by the Agreement to support and monitor its implementation, as well as in the upcoming elections.

The continued deterioration in the security situation, in particular in central Mali, remains of great concern. We are particularly alarmed by the increasing number of civilian casualties, now the highest number during any reporting period since the deployment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We are also deeply concerned by the spillover of insecurity into Burkina Faso and the wider region. The targeted attacks on civilians and intercommunal clashes, limited access to humanitarian support and inadequate access to basic social services and justice are deeply concerning. Allegations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, reports of widespread conflict-related sexual violence

and grave violations against children further add to those concerns. We call on the Malian Government to increase efforts to prevent and investigate human rights violations and abuses, including those committed by the Malian armed forces.

It is now urgent to stem the tide of violence and carefully assess our joint approach to the protection of civilians in the central regions. That includes assessing the approach of the Government, the United Nations and other actors. Addressing the root causes of the situation must also be part of that analysis. We welcome further information on the ongoing efforts in that regard, including in relation to resolution 2423 (2018) and the Government's integrated security plan. We also commend the efforts of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, and we continue to advocate for sustained support.

Sweden remains a committed partner to Mali and the entire Sahel region in their efforts to enhance security and development and build sustainable peace. Our broader commitment includes support through the United Nations and the European Union, and through bilateral and regional development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. It also includes a substantial troop contribution to MINUSMA, where Swedish Lieutenant General Dennis Gyllensporre took up his functions as Force Commander of MINUSMA on 2 October. We will continue to strongly support the Mission, including through continuous engagement on the commitments made within the framework of the Action for Peacekeeping agenda. The decline in the number of peacekeeper fatalities in Mali is encouraging. It is important, however, that measures be taken to enhance the mobility of troops, with the aim of achieving greater operational effect in parallel with the efforts to strengthen the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Long-term stability and prosperity in Mali can be achieved only through a combination of security and development support. Strategic coordination must continue to be strengthened within MINUSMA and the United Nations, as well as coordination with the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and other partners. It is also important that cooperation be further enhanced between the countries in the Sahel region and the United Nations, including the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, so as to further advance the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. The Peacebuilding Commission offers an important forum for continuing discussions in that regard, including as steps are taken to transfer certain tasks to the United Nations country team and other development partners.

During the three years since the signing of the peace agreement for Mali, important progress has been made, but much still needs to be done to advance its effective implementation. We commend all of the efforts made and continue to urge all parties to take further steps without delay. Sweden will continue to offer its full support.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We join others in expressing our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his comprehensive briefing. We also welcome the presence of Ambassador Konfourou of Mali in the Council today. As an observer member of the African Union, we commend and associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Côte d'Ivoire and statements that will be made today by other members of the African troika, namely, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia. We endorse the recommendations in the Secretary-General's quarterly report (S/2018/866) and would like to make the following observations regarding the situation in Mali.

At the outset, we would like to congratulate the people of Mali on the peaceful and successful conduct of their presidential elections. We commend the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) for its logistical and technical assistance to the electoral process, and praise Special Representative Annadif and the representatives of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as France and Operation Barkhane, for their important role in facilitating peaceful dialogue among the political parties and ensuring stability in the country.

Every effort should now be made to accelerate the implementation of the remaining provisions of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Kazakhstan acknowledges the progress made in appointing interim authorities, operationalizing mixed units in the northern regions and adopting a national security-sector reform strategy. My delegation also welcomes the signing of a pact for peace between the Government of Mali and the United Nations, which we believe will significantly contribute to the fulfilment of the Agreement. The genuine inclusion of women in the peace process and in decision-making is also important

for lasting stability. In that regard, we recognize and appreciate the important work done by the Government of Mali so far to improve the human rights situation in the country, and encourage it to continue its much-needed efforts in this direction.

At the same time, we are deeply concerned about the growing cycle of violence in northern and central Mali, which has led to a significant deterioration in the humanitarian situation there. We urge all sides to comply with the relevant provisions of international law and call on international partners and donors to fund the humanitarian response plan for 2018.

Violent extremism and terrorism remain the main sources of instability. To counter these scourges with the overall goal of establishing a terrorism-free Africa, we need an approach that links security and development efforts. The challenges in Mali are common to all countries of the region and elsewhere in Africa. I would like to underline that during the Council's recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its previous visits to Lake Chad, West Africa and other conflict zones, we have heard the desire of host countries to devote more resources to economic development and the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), based on a regional approach. Indeed, a regional approach is crucially important to progress on the political, security and environmental fronts. Unfortunately, that focus is missing from the mandates of almost all peacekeeping operations, but we understand that there are objective reasons for that.

In that regard, we welcome General Assembly resolution 72/279, on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in line with the Secretary-General's new agenda for peace and his United Nations reform programme, one of the main elements of which is a revamped regional approach. For instance, in West Africa and the Sahel, we see an obvious need for introducing a separate team for specifically addressing the SDGs so as not to overload the existing regional United Nations offices, and which we believe could function in close collaboration with ECOWAS. In that regard, the proposed launch of an SDG centre in Kazakhstan for our part of the world could serve as a pilot project that could be further implemented in the African region.

Priority should also be given to national reconciliation, ensuring basic services, resilience-building, a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, good governance and the rule of law. Equally important are educating children and employing young people, who together constitute about 65 per cent of the Malian population. These are all essential to achieving lasting peace and stability in Mali.

Combating terrorism and other cross-border threats in Mali and its neighbours will succeed only if these measures are implemented comprehensively throughout the Sahel region as a whole. We support the full operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and underscore the importance of sustainable funding for it. We also call on all parties in Mali and the countries of the region to make every effort to implement the recently recalibrated United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, which is a good basis for strengthened regional cooperation.

With regard to MINUSMA, we welcome the Mission's measures to reprioritize its tasks aimed at expanding its role in advancing the peace process. We also praise its successful implementation of its action plan to reduce peacekeeper fatalities. At the same time, it is critical to address the Mission's remaining capability gaps by providing better equipment and predeployment training that prepares contingents for the asymmetric conflict situations that Mali presents. It also important to protect the Malians themselves.

In conclusion, we commend Special Representative Annadif and all the brave men and women representing the United Nations for their commitment to peace in such a hazardous, hostile and challenging environment. Lastly, we fully support the outcome document proposed by the Permanent Representative of France.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his very informative briefing on recent developments in Mali. I would like to focus on three issues: the political process, the human rights situation and the security situation.

First, on the political process, we commend the Malian people for their peaceful and successful holding of the presidential elections within the time frame set by the Constitution, despite several anomalies and some security incidents in northern and central Mali. Following the re-election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, we welcome his renewed commitment to the swift and full implementation of the remaining

key provisions of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. In that regard, we commend the Government of Mali and the United Nations for signing a pact for peace, in accordance with resolution 2423 (2018), at the last session of the Agreement Monitoring Committee in October. The pact represents new momentum for political reforms in areas such as decentralization, the security sector and the rule of law, as well as socioeconomic development based on greater inclusiveness and with the coherent support of international and regional partners.

Secondly, the human rights situation remains alarming. We therefore call on the Malian Government to prevent human rights violations and abuses, including those committed by Malian armed forces when conducting counter-terrorism operations. Full and timely investigations into all allegations are essential, as are measures designed to bring perpetrators of these crimes to account.

We also want to underline the responsibility of the Malian authorities to take every action necessary to swiftly investigate and prosecute perpetrators of crimes and grave human rights abuses against civilians, as well as those responsible for attacks against humanitarian workers, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), international forces and Malian defence and security forces. Taking into account MINUSMA's crucial role in stabilizing Mali, we welcome its efforts aimed at improving the security of United Nations peacekeepers, which have resulted in a reduction of fatalities and casualties in the Mission.

The impact of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel on the stabilization of the region cannot be ignored. We therefore welcome the efforts made towards operationalizing the Joint Force, including its police component, which will ensure continuity between Joint Force operations and the judicial systems, in accordance with the rule of law and human rights. We also take note of the appointment of the Joint Force's new Force Commander, General Hanena Ould Sidi of Mauritania, and his assumption of his duties.

In conclusion, Poland commends Special Representative Mahamat Saleh Annadif for his excellent leadership, and all United Nations civilian and uniformed personnel for their continued hard work in a challenging environment. We also welcome the appointment of Lieutenant General Dennis Gyllensporre of Sweden as Force Commander of MINUSMA.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing.

Russia welcomed the successful holding of presidential elections in Mali in July and August. We are pleased that the voting took place without serious violations or incidents, according to African and international observers. We are grateful to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) for its timely provision of logistics and technical assistance for the preparation for the elections. We hope that the election results will contribute to restoring peace and achieving national harmony in Mali and will enable Malian society to cope with its ongoing problems and deal more effectively with the terrorist threat in the Sahara-Sahel region generally.

We note Bamako's efforts to restore a State presence in northern Mali. The work on organizing municipal bodies has been stepped up since the summer and temporary administrations have been appointed in most districts. Importantly, the Government has begun to help to stimulate economic activity in those areas, which is the best antidote to new social disturbances.

We also note that Malians are making efforts to reform the security sector. The emphasis here should be on implementing the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. Strengthening confidence-building measures and collaboration between the country's armed forces and the groups under the control of the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Platform should become the basis for restoring peace and order. We support starting joint patrols in Gao as soon as possible.

We welcome the signing on 15 October of a pact for peace between the Malian authorities and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. It is important that representatives of the Platform and the Coordination also announced their commitment to the document. We hope that it represents an additional guarantee that the parties will implement the road map and the Peace Agreement, as provided for in resolution 2423 (2018).

While acknowledging the obvious positive developments in the work of achieving a settlement in Mali, we should not omit to point out some other

and unfortunately less encouraging trends there. We are concerned about the sharp jump in the number of terrorist acts in the past three months. Interethnic and intercommunal conflicts are becoming increasingly intense in central Mali, and the situation is complicated by the fact that the presence of the authorities in these areas is still at a critically low level. In that regard, we should note the results that MINUSMA has had in reconciling the hostile parties.

We are also concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The number of people in need of help has gone up almost one and a half times over the past year, a very worrying trend. We call on all outside donors to fulfil their funding commitments for the humanitarian appeal. We should remind everyone that the desperate circumstances that Mali's young people find themselves in leave them with nowhere to go but to join the ranks of terrorist, extremist or criminal groups.

The situation in Mali is a significant factor for African security generally. However, neither will it possible to reach a settlement there without normalizing the situation in the entire region. The Libya factor is still playing a negative role in that regard. The connections between the terrorists operating in Mali and in the region as a whole are becoming increasingly visible. In that regard, we support the concrete steps taken by the States of the Group of Five for the Sahel to form their Joint Force to fight terrorism and organized crime, and we hope that their role in ensuring regional security will increase.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his useful briefing on recent developments in Mali, particularly in the wake of the presidential elections held in July.

Since Ambassador Issa Konfourou, Permanent Representative of Mali, is here with us today, I take this opportunity to congratulate President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita on his re-election as Mali's Head of State. I also express my country's satisfaction regarding the fact that the electoral process was transparent and credible, and commend the efforts of the Government and all political stakeholders, as well as international partners, to that end.

I would like to address three aspects of the subject under discussion today.

First, with respect to the political situation, we have closely followed recent political developments in Mali and also listened to the address delivered by the President of the Republic of Mali to the General Assembly during the general debate last month (see A/73/PV.8), in which he presented his Government's priorities for the upcoming period, including its focus on the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and the serious steps taken by his Government in this regard. Kuwait welcomes this positive development.

During the past few months we have witnessed the restoration of Government authority in northern and central Mali, and we also note that the Government has prepared a national strategy for security sector reform. We further commend the efforts of Prime Minister Maïga to achieve stability. He recently visited central Mali, a region that is suffering from instability and an absence of State authority. He is also working to expedite the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme.

We welcomed the signing last Monday of the pact for peace between the United Nations, the Government, the Platform Platform coalition of armed groups and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, renewing the commitment of all parties to the implementation of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation, in implemention of paragraph 5 of resolution 2423 (2018). We want to emphasize the important role played by the international mediation team, under the leadership of Algeria, in monitoring developments and making tangible progress.

With regard to the presidential elections held in July, we commend the efforts of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and Special Representative Annadif for their efforts during and after the election process, including the provision of technical, logistical and security support with a view to reducing tensions between the various parties. We urge everyone to respect the election results and prepare for the upcoming parliamentary elections, which were postponed until next year with the approval of all stakeholders. We hope that the postponement will allow enough time to implement the necessary reforms in the country, pursuant to the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, and with the participation of all political parties.

Secondly, concerning the security and humanitarian situations, we are still concerned about the unstable security situation in some regions of Mali. The threats posed by terrorist groups still exist, and we have seen their impact on the most recent electoral process. We value the efforts of the Malian forces and MINUSMA to contain those threats and prevent the security situation from deteriorating further. However, the terrorist groups are not only a threat to all military forces, but are increasingly threateningcivilians. We deeply regret the killing of 287 civilians during the reporting period. Terrorist threats also led to the displacement of large numbers of Malians. The number of those in need of humanitarian aid amounts to nearly 5.2 million people. We are also concerned about the increasing threats targeting humanitarian workers, who are undertaking efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Malian people.

We have seen an increase in the use of improvised explosive devices in 2018, rising to almost 130 incidents. However, the number of related casualties has decreased. We apreciate the efforts of MINUSMA in training and awareness-raising, and we encourage it to pursue those efforts in the future. We also underscore the importance of ensuring coordination among the different active forces in Mali. We commend the continuous support of MINUSMA to the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) Joint Force, which plays an essential role in combating the threats in the Sahel region. We look forward to strengthening it to the fullest.

Thirdly and lastly, with regard to the next steps, we are aware that the Malian Government is in need of time and resources to achieve security and stability and restore the rule of law in Mali. After the latest presidential elections and the reappointment of Prime Minister Maïga, who has facilitated progress since the beginning of his term, we look forward to a more focused approach by the Government to ensure the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Kuwait stands ready to cooperate with all Council members to take the necessary measures in order to facilitate that process. We urge all parties to build on the progress attained so far.

Achieving sustainable development is essential to the realization of peace and stability in Mali and the region. It is also important to improve economic conditions, because that would give Malians greater hope for job opportunities and a better future. We welcome the new strategic framework of the Government, which is based on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the vision for Mali 2040.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his briefing. I would also like to welcome Mr. Issa Konfourou, Permanent Representative of Mali and my personal friend. We thank Mr. Koen Davidse for his service as Deputy Special Representative for Mali, and we wish every success to his replacement, Ms. Joanne Adamson, who is here with us today.

Today, I would like to focus on three points: first, the political and security situation; secondly, the peace process; and thirdly, action for peacekeeping.

First, I will address the political and security situation. Allow me to offer President Keita the sincere congratulations of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on his re-election. I would also like to commend the joint and coordinated action of the international community, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), in supporting the electoral process. In the wake of the elections, tensions between the Government and the opposition have persisted. It is essential that the long-awaited reforms move forward. Decentralization is an imperative. The electoral system needs to be radically overhauled.

Malian citizens deserve to have a Government that they can trust, and one that trusts them. The Secretary-General considers the human rights situation alarming. The fact that the Malian armed forces are directly linked to 18 cases of violations of those rights raises serious concerns. Four cases involve summary executions. We urge the Malian Government to prevent and publicly denounce human rights violations, including those committed by Malian forces, such as in Boulikessi, where 12 civilians were killed. The Government must investigate allegations of violations and prosecute the perpetrators. It is important therefore that those responsible, as established by the investigations, not go unpunished. That is particularly true in central Mali, a region where human rights and the security situation are deteriorating rapidly, as Mr. Lacroix mentioned.

The repercussions of Mali's instability are felt beyond the country's borders, throughout the Sahel and in Europe. The stability of the entire region is crucial to the fight against such threats as trafficking in human beings, illegal immigration, terrorism and organized

crime. We also call for the operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel). That includes the implementation of a strict framework for human rights compliance. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will maintain its strong commitment as a partner for stability in the Sahel.

Secondly, I now turn to the peace process. Following the elections, the President of Mali was re-elected. We therefore expect a new impetus to be given to the peace process and the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Admittedly, progress has been made with regard to the peace process. But the full implementation of the agreement is far from assured. Malians have seen too few tangible results. That is why we call on all parties concerned, and especially the Government, to take up the challenge and move forward, in the interest of the Malian State, its population and the stability of the entire region.

The role of MINUSMA has been essential in supporting the peace process and stabilization efforts in northern Mali. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's efforts to give new momentum to the political process. We welcome the signing of the pact for peace on Monday. We particularly welcome the Government's commitment to an inclusive approach. The implementation of the pact should be as inclusive as possible. It must embody the voice and effective participation of women, youth and civil society.

The pact must also be used to make progress on the peace agreement and make it more measurable. We expect progress on the key proposals of the agreement: first, the effective establishment of legitimate bodies and services of the State; secondly, decentralization; thirdly, reconciliation; and fourthly, reform of the security sector and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

Resolution 2423 (2018) requires the full integration into the Malian defence and security forces of at least 1,000 members of the signatory armed groups. We expect all parties to honour that obligation. The Council has already been firm in its exhortations to make the necessary progress. We must not hesitate to continue in that direction by using the sanctions regime against those who obstruct the peace process.

Thirdly, I will speak about action for peacekeeping. The Kingdom of the Netherlands commends the men and women engaged in the Mission, including our compatriots. During the last reporting period, the Mission suffered no casualties, even though attacks against it and its troops continued. That is due to the effective implementation of the recommendations of the report authored by former United Nations Force Commander, Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, entitled Improving security of United Nations peacekeepers. It is also the result of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, for which Mali is a key case study. But as Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix said, we must remain cautious because we do not know what tomorrow will bring.

As a troop-contributing country, the Netherlands has sought to improve the performance and impact of MINUSMA. In particular, we have contributed to cutting-edge capabilities in the area of intelligence. We have also encouraged a rotation system, recognizing that the continued availability of those resources is crucial to the effectiveness of peacekeeping. We will continue to support the Secretary-General in his efforts to advance the priorities of Action for Peacekeeping. We commend the leadership of Côte d'Ivoire on that issue, in its capacity as co-Chair of the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations.

The new MINUSMA mandate requires a comprehensive strategic framework. It attaches particular attention to migration, climate and the human rights capabilities of the Mission. We would appreciate it if the Secretary-General could elaborate on those issues in his next report. It is essential that MINUSMA have the surge resources and capacities necessary to effectively implement its mandate. That includes taking firm and effective measures to protect civilians, by military and non-military means, in particular in central Mali.

In conclusion, now that the elections are behind us, our work begins.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his comprehensive briefing on the most recent political and security situation in Mali. We also want to extend our appreciation to the military and civilian personnel of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), who are operating under difficult circumstances.

We welcome the successful holding of the presidential elections in Mali, which culminated with the re-election of President Boubacar Keita. We note that the election was held in a peaceful manner and

without major incident, and we congratulate Mali for achieving an important milestone in its governance dispensations. The formation of the new Cabinet, comprising one-third women, is a sign of the positive response of the Government in meeting its commitment with regard to the empowerment of women.

The role of MINUSMA continues to be very important and its support of the electoral process, in coordination with the African Union and other international partners, is commendable. We also thank the Mission for its support to the Malian defence and security forces, including through increased patrols in remote areas. We agree with Under-Secretary-General Lacroix that the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali remains very central, and we are encouraged by the progress made with regard to its implementation, including the nomination of interim authorities at the district level, the creation of municipalities and the adoption of the national security sector reform strategy. We hope that the post-election period will witness more invigorated efforts by the parties to ensure greater peace and stability in the country.

The pact for peace, signed by the Government of Mali and the United Nations in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2423 (2018), is a step in the right direction that we hope will help in accelerating the implementation of the peace agreement.

Regarding the extension of State authority in the north, the appointment of officials by the Government as members of the interim administrations in the majority of districts is a welcome development. MINUSMA's support in the restoration and extension of State authority in the northern and central parts of the country remains vital, as is the capacity-building support bof the Mission, together with the United Nations Development Programme, in the implementation of the national policy of preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism in Mali.

We join others in strongly condemning the terrorist attacks against Malian defence and security forces, as well as international forces. We are concerned by the frequency of those attacks in central Mali, as expressed by other delegations. That underscores the need for the international community to continue supporting the fight against terrorism and the stabilization efforts in Mali.

The contribution of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel in returning peace and stability to Mali and the region remains absolutely important. We commend the Force for deploying all seven battalions and its success in conducting several operations since its establishment. To ensure that the operations of that important regional force are effective and sustainable, predictable financing remains critical, as identified by the tripartite mechanism, comprising the Joint Force, the United Nations and the European Union.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation, as a result of insecurity in the northern and central regions, as well as the impacts of poor rainfall in 2017, is also a matter of concern. We hope that the international community will enhance its support in filling the funding gap.

We are encouraged by the commitment of the regional interim administrations, which are materializing several projects targeting the improvement of the provision of basic services and enhancing social cohesion in all five northern regions, with funding from the Government.

The implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel remains absolutely important, and we believe that there is need for enhanced efforts in its implementation.

Finally, we support the proposal of France for a press element at the end of this meeting.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing.

Following the recent successful presidential elections, President Keita has started a new term of office. He has promised to continue to actively implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, thereby injecting new momentum into the peace process. China expresses its appreciation in that connection.

However, at the same time, the security situation in north and central Mali remains grim with rampant terrorist activities inside the country and in the neighbouring region posing a serious threat to the peace process. The international community should, on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and leadership of Mali, continue to support the peace process and provide support to peace and the development of the country.

First, we must continue to help the parties in the implementation of the peace agreement and moving the political process forward. The political solution is the only way out. In that connection, China hopes that

the signatories of the peace agreement will continue to demonstrate political will, facilitate the implementation of the agreement and work together to achieve national development and reconstruction.

Secondly, we must continue to support the Government's capacity-building in governance and security. The Malian Government bears the primary responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the country. At the request of the Government, the international community should continue to support and assist the Government in its security and counter-terrorism capacity-building and enhance the Government's ability to respond to security threats independently.

Thirdly, we must support regional and subregional organizations in playing a mediation and coordinating role, as the peace and security of the country are closely linked with the overall security situation in the region. Therefore, it is necessary to take a comprehensive approach and to respond to terrorist activities inside the country and in the neighbouring regions through regional cooperation.

China welcomes the formation of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel to independently fight security threats, including terrorism, in the region. That is an important initiative on the part of the African countries to achieve strength through unity and to maintain peace and stability in Africa and in the world at large. China commends the preparatory work done by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in order to support the Joint Force and hopes that, once the conditions are ripe, MINUSMA will be able to take effective actions to backstop the Joint Forces as soon as possible.

MINUSMA and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali have played an important role in maintaining peace and stability in the country and in the implementation of the peace agreement. China expresses its appreciation in that connection, and hopes that MINUSMA will continue to communicate and coordinate with the Government in order to help the latter in the implementation of the peace agreement and in enhancing its security capacity-building.

At the same time, the Council and the Secretariat must pay attention to the issue of the safety and security of the Mission's personnel. We hope that the secretariat of MINUSMA will take effective actions in areas relating to the Mission's equipment and training, campsite planning, security and protection material and equipment, medical ability, and information-gathering and -sharing in order to strengthen the safety and security of the Mission's personnel. China supports the peace process in Mali. Chinese peacekeepers are actively engaged in the Mission's peacekeeping operations and have made their contribution to stability in the country. China is ready to continue to play a constructive roll towards the achievement of peace, stability and development in the country and in Africa at large.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting, and we thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix for the important information he has provided. We also welcome Ambassador Issa Konfourou, Permanent Representative of Mali.

We would like, through him, to congratulate the people and Government of Mali on the holding of their presidential elections in a peaceful manner, despite the complicated security situation. We think it is important for it to be able to lead to greater stability and dialogue between the political parties in order to more effectively address the serious challenges facing the country.

We also wish to highlight the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, as well as the role played by the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and other international actors, such as France. In this new phase, we wish to renew our support for the full implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

In particular, we underline the importance of the progress made in the appointment of interim authorities in the north of the country, the adoption of the national security sector reform strategy, and the gradual operationalization of mixed units of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in Kidal and Timbuktu. We also highlight the recent signing of the pact for peace, in accordance with resolution 2423 (2018). We hope that it will help revitalize and accelerate the implementation of the peace agreement and contribute to the stability of the country.

We note with concern the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation in Mali, particularly in the centre of the country, as well as the alarming number of cases of murder, kidnapping,

intimidation and sexual and gender-based violence. Greater State presence must be projected throughout the territory in order to promote the rule of law, combat terrorist groups and put an end to clashes between armed groups. In that connection, we highlight three items to prioritize in order to achieve sustainable peace in Mali.

First, the signatory parties to the peace agreement must work to reconstitute and redeploy Mali's defence and security forces and territorial police. That is urgent in order to lay the foundation for stability and civilian protection in the country.

Secondly, there is a need to combat impunity and ensure accountability for serious human rights violations committed by armed groups and by Malian law enforcement and security forces. It is essential that the judicial system be able to investigate and process complaints in a comprehensive and timely manner.

Thirdly, the root causes of conflict must be addressed in order to build a peaceful and inclusive society, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The economic growth of recent years is important, but it is also crucial to increase the budget for education and employment opportunities, particularly for young people, and to ensure the full participation of women. In that regard, we highlight the efforts of the Malian Government in preparing a new strategic framework for economic recovery and sustainable development.

In conclusion, we wish to acknowledge the work of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel to strengthen the regional response to scourges such as terrorism and transnational organized crime, as well as the key role of MINUSMA in a particularly complex environment.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation once again thanks the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing and his hard work on this issue. The convening of this meeting is undoubtedly further proof of the willingness of the Security Council to support Mali in the face of the complex and multidimensional challenges it faces, and allows us to renew our firm commitment to the stabilization of this country.

We welcome the peaceful conduct of the recent presidential elections that led to the re-election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and the formation of a more representative Government with significant female representation. In wishing him success in his functions, we recall that progress in the full and inclusive implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali must remain one of the main priorities of the new Government. Indeed, the peace agreement remains the ideal inclusive and consensual framework for restoring peace and stability in Mali. It is therefore essential that the signatory parties redouble their efforts to ensure the diligent implementation of all the provisions of the Agreement.

However, my Government welcomes progress made in the priority action timeline and especially its road map, such as the creation of interim authorities in the five regions of northern Mali; the redeployment of the army in several cities of the country and the gradual resumption of mixed patrols composed of elements of the Malian defence and security forces; the pro-Government movements of the Platform coalition of armed groups and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad in Kidal and Timbuktu, as agreed in 2016 in the framework of the Operational Coordination Mechanism; and the start of the preregistration phase for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, which is crucial. These are all undoubtedly positive steps to build trust between the security forces and the various local armed groups.

While it is true that the lack of implementation of the commitments undertaken can be partly explained by the lack of political will of the parties concerned, we must accept that there can be no lasting stability in Mali if the agreement is not fully implemented. Therefore, after the holding of the presidential elections and the coming legislative elections, substantial progress must be made in mobilizing all actors in order to make further important gains towards the implementation of the key institutional and security reforms outlined in the agreement and in resolution 2423 (2018).

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea will continue to support any initiative aimed at promoting ownership of peace processes in unstable countries and regions of the world. That is why we gladly welcome the signing of the pact for peace on 15 October. As Mr. Lacroix has pointed out, this new partnership among the United Nations, the Malian Government and the signatory armed movements does not replace the 2015 agreement, the priority action timeline or even the March road map. Instead, it symbolizes the renewal of the parties' commitment to giving significant impetus to the

implementation of the peace agreement and serves as a catalyst to strengthen the inclusive nature of the political process. Similarly, its objective should not be to reinvent what has been agreed, but rather to allow for the effective implementation of the commitments undertaken in the framework of the peace agreement, with a clear and well-defined time horizon.

In that context, we must also reaffirm our satisfaction with the operational support provided by Operation Barkhane to MINUSMA, which must focus primarily on mechanisms to improve its operational capacity, including the security of its personnel. In addition, the stabilization of the situation in central Mali, the focus of continuous terrorist attacks, requires a comprehensive solution. We reiterate that any response to violent extremism must go beyond a military approach. We should focus on a humanitarian and sustainable response that can meet the political and economic needs of the population and peoples of Mali.

I conclude by endorsing the words of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, who recently stated at a high-level meeting on Mali and the Sahel:

> "We cannot stress enough that for lasting peace to be built in Mali, the inclusion of all sectors of society is needed. Although it is true that violence cannot be halted without the involvement of the armed parties, it is also clear that without the full participation of other components of society, the achievements already obtained will remain fragile, reversible and at the mercy of any disagreement between the parties. The stabilization of Mali means the stabilization of the neighbouring countries and that the entire Sahel region and beyond. That means that the signatory parties to the Peace Agreement bear a great responsibility."

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali, Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, and all of his staff for their important work, as well as Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/866), and through Under-Secretary-General Lacroix we pay tribute to the bravery of those working in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), in the very challenging environment in which the military and civilian personnel operate. And, of course, we unequivocally condemn all attacks against MINUSMA personnel.

I would like to congratulate President Keita on his re-election and the Malian people and their institutions on the relatively peaceful elections, despite terrorist attempts to disrupt the process. We also commend the support provided by MINUSMA and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif in bringing all parties together for a peaceful conclusion. The United Kingdom encourages President Keita to redouble efforts to secure a lasting peace and to improve the lives of all Malian people, including those facing increasing insecurity in the central region.

I join my colleagues in welcoming the signing of the pact for peace by the Agreement Monitoring Committee. The parties that have reconfirmed their commitment to accelerating the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali must now take action and fulfil their commitment to make tangible progress against the 22 March road map. Their credibility is on the line. Progress must also include the meaningful participation of women in the peace process, and we welcome the steps taken by President Keita to ensure that the 30 per cent quota for women in elected positions is met, as per Malian law.

The price of lack of progress is clear: the humanitarian and security situation continues to deteriorate across Mali, particularly in the central region; and 287 civilians have been killed in the past three months, the highest number since MINUSMA deployed. Today 5.2 million people require life-saving and protection assistance, up from 3.8 million in 2017. It is therefore more vital than ever that the Malian Government and the international community fulfil their humanitarian and security commitments. In that context, we welcome the role of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

An integrated security plan is needed to address the causes of the humanitarian crisis and civilian casualties. We are concerned about the number of human rights violations and cases of sexual exploitation and abuse; all such violations must be thoroughly investigated in order to bring perpetrators of crimes to account, including those that involve the Malian defence and security forces. This is a global priority for the United Kingdom. Yesterday in London we hosted an international safeguarding summit as part of

our commitment to driving up standards and tackling sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

Returning to MINUSMA, we welcome its ongoing efforts to focus its mandate on core political and security tasks, and we encourage further progress in this regard as we look towards MINUSMA's six-month review, in February.

The bottom line is that rapid progress is needed by the politicians on the implementation of the Agreement. This is the best and only sustainable way to improve the lives of the people of Mali and to enhance collective peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Bolivia thanks the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing on the situation in the Republic of Mali and the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on the ground. We also welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Mali, Ambassador Konfourou. We echo other delegations that have expressed their support for the Chadian members of the Mission who were wounded in the course of an attack using an improvised explosive device and wish them a speedy and full recovery. We would like also to express our condolences in connection with the death of a member of the Barkhane force during the discharge of the force's mission.

We would like to begin by underscoring the important progress made in the political sphere in Mali. In the framework of the provisions of resolution 2423 (2018), we commend and welcome the signing of the pact for peace a few days ago in Bamako, on the margins of the meetings of the Agreement Monitoring Committee. We fully agree with the delegations that have stressed the importance of that event, as it offers an opportunity to revitalize the peace process in that brotherly nation. We also agree with the Secretary-General's statement in paragraph 87 of his report (S/2018/866) that the pact for peace should not "duplicate structures or replace the Agreement". The pact is, in any case, simply an instrument that represents a positive complement to the interests and efforts of the Malian people, the United Nations and the international community, as it contributes to defusing tensions and to building a system of democratic coexistence that will help to alleviate the difficult situation that prevails today in Mali.

Furthermore, we commend the efforts of the Government of the Republic of Mali regarding, first and foremost, the definitive cessation of hostilities on the basis of national plans and the taking of fundamental political measures aimed at achieving peace and stability in the country. Regarding the elections that took place in July, we commend the fact that in spite of certain difficulties, the elections took place in satisfactory conditions and in a peaceful environment, in the presence of international observers and in the context of the deployment and active role of the Malian security forces and the crucial support of MINUSMA, which included mainly logistical support and technical assistance.

We wish also to stress the progress that the Government of Mali has been spearheading in areas such as the appointment and deployment of interim authorities in 21 districts of the five northern regions, as well as the progressive operationalization of the mixed units of the Operational Coordination Mechanism.

It has been five years since the creation of MINUSMA and three years since the signing of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Mali's efforts to achieve the necessary stability still require the full support of the Council and of our Organization as a whole. The complex and fragile humanitarian and security situation in Mali has spread throughout the Sahel region as a result of the interventionism and regime-change policies in Libya. The situation has had repercussions on the volatile security sector, compounded by the presence of terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations in the country.

Asymmetric and terrorist threats, continuing clashes between armed groups, and intercommunal and sexual violence continue to threaten the safety and lives of civilians and to hinder the economic growth and development of the country. We note with deep concern that in northern and central Mali, the criminal activities of mercenaries, drug and arms traffickers, and those who traffic in human beings have become a way of life that is hampering the full implementation of the Peace Agreement and contributing on a daily basis to the deteriorating security situation and political process.

For all of these reasons, it is vital to highlight and express appreciation for the work of the personnel of MINUSMA, which has stepped up its efforts to

ensure not only the definitive implementation of the Peace Agreement through monitoring the latter and facilitating a political dialogue through its mediation and good offices in coordination with the Malian Government, but also the restoration and extension of State authority in the northern and central parts of the country. Similarly, the work of the Mission in the development of the reform of the security sector action plan, the implementation of the national vision for the reconstitution and redeployment of the Malian defence and security forces, and the development of the conceptual framework for the territorial police in the regions of Gao, Mopti and Timbuktu is of critical importance.

In conclusion, we cannot ignore the outstanding contributions made by the regional and subregional organizations, led by the African Union, in cooperation and coordination with the European Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie. We strongly urge and encourage the international community to continue to contribute, with technical support, economic and humanitarian cooperation, to all initiatives to benefit the population by establishing stability and permanent peace in Mali and the Sahel region.

I shall now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Konfourou (Mali) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to convey the regrets of Ms. Kamissa Camara, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, who is unable to be with us this morning because of schedule demands.

I am very pleased to convey to you, Madam President, the warm congratulations of my delegation on the accession of your beautiful country, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, to the presidency of the Council for the month of October. We assure you of our full cooperation.

Let me also express to the delegation of the United States of America our sincere appreciation for its outstanding conduct of the Council's work last month.

The briefings on this item are always a good opportunity to reiterate to Secretary-General António Guterres and to all United Nations personnel involved in Mali the profound gratitude of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, the Government and the people of Mali, for their ongoing commitment to peace and stability in Mali, the Sahel and the rest of the world.

The Government of Mali takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/866) before us, and I thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for introducing it. I take note of the comments and strong expectations that Council members expressed earlier. Let me now share with the Council the remarks of the Government of Mali on the report of the Secretary-General.

First, I welcome the fact that the report recognizes the substantial progress made recently in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, emanating from the Algiers process. Among the developments that have been noted, I wish to highlight the successful organization on 29 July and 12 August of the election of the President of the Republic within the time prescribed by the Constitution of Mali. The balloting, which took place in conditions deemed satisfactory by national and international observers, established the election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita as Head of State for a second five-year term.

The good preparation and the satisfactory conduct of the electoral process, in a framework of unwavering cooperation, were made possible thanks to the combined efforts of all the actors of the Malian public sphere, including members of civil society, as well as the significant involvement of partners and friends of Mali. I commend the role and immense contribution of United Nations personnel and other national and international forces in the successful organization of the electoral process. I would make special mention here of the remarkable work done by Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

I would also like to pay tribute to Belgian Major General Jean-Paul Deconinck, whose deployment ended on 2 October, for his exemplary leadership and outstanding service as Force Commander of MINUSMA. By the same token, I extend the warm congratulations of the Government of Mali to his successor, Swedish Lieutenant General Dennis Gyllensporre, for the confidence placed in him by the Secretary-General. We assure him of the full cooperation of the Government of Mali.

This is also an opportunity to commend the excellent work done over the past three years by Mr. Koen Davidse of the Netherlands as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali. I welcome the appointment of Ms. Joanne Adamson of the United Kingdom to that post and assure her of all Malians. I know that Joanne is in the Chamber. She is a great friend of Mali and Malians, and she can count on our support.

I understand the Council's impatience with what it considers to be delays in the implementation of the agreement. However, I can assure the Council that there is no ambivalence in the shared desire of the signatory parties to honour the commitments made in the irreplaceable instrument that is the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. The perfect illustration of that has just been provided yet again by the Malian parties with the signing on Monday, 15 October, of the pact for peace in Mali between the Government and the United Nations, and the solemn accession of the signatory movements, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Platform coalition of armed groups, through a written declaration of acceptance of that instrument. Under the terms of the pact, a copy of which I have provided to Council members, the Malian parties reaffirm their firm commitment to accelerating the diligent and full implementation of the agreement, in accordance with paragraph 5 of resolution 2423 (2018). However, the pact for peace is by no means a new agreement in Mali.

It is true that the fulfilment of those commitments has long suffered from the belated establishment of relations of real trust among the various Malian protagonists. Today, that prerequisite is now satisfied, and the resulting positive effects are very telling. As the Council is well aware, the establishment of interim authorities and the ongoing operationalization of mixed patrols, combined with the gradual redeployment of the Malian armed forces, allow for the long-awaited return of the administration and basic social services in many localities previously held in the grip of terrorists and armed gangs.

Secondly, the absence of belligerence and clashes between the Malian armed forces and the signatory movements is another illustration of the progress achieved. The return of trust has also resulted in the participation of the signatory movements in safeguarding the electoral process. The Secretary-General saw this positive and constructive momentum during his visit to Mali in May.

In the same vein, 63 territorial collectivities have been created in the new regions of Ménaka and Taoudenni, with a view to making them fully operational so that they can fulfil their primary mission of delivering basic social services to our populations. In that context, I welcome the continuation of the preregistration campaign for combatants, which is a major step forward in the cantonment and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, the cornerstone of our national strategy for stabilizing the country. On that point, I note that the Malian parties agreed at the meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, on 15 October in Bamako, to launch an accelerated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for the period 5-30 November.

Still on the subject of our efforts to provide security throughout our national territory, the process of security sector reform is proceeding normally, according to the criteria set, in particular with regard to ensuring that all actors concerned are included.

As the Council can see, the Government remains fully committed to playing its full part in the early implementation of the agreement. However, it must be acknowledged that the implementation of certain provisions of the agreement requires considerable financial commitments that, regrettably, Mali alone cannot make. That is why I reiterate the Government's call for the effective marshalling of the resources pledged by our partners at the donor conference on Mali held in Paris on 22 October 2015, which would enable us to uphold the commitments outlined in the road map of 22 March and the pact for peace that we have just signed.

Today more than ever, the continued implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, emanating from the Algiers process, is one of the main priorities of the President of the Republic and of the Government of Mali. We have no other option, let alone a plan B. That is the sovereign choice we have made to build genuine and lasting reconciliation for our people in a truly diverse Mali. That is why, in the new governmental structure implemented on 9 September, the Head of State created the important Ministry for Ministry of National Reconciliation and Social Cohesion so as to ensure the improved coordination

of State actions and financial resources to implement the agreement.

The presence of several young people and women in the Government is also part of that dynamic. Women, for example, account for more than 30 per cent of the total number of Government employees, in accordance with legislation on the promotion of gender in decision-making bodies in Mali. We are also working on the charter for peace, unity and national reconciliation, emanating from the work of the Conference of National Understanding, which calls for innovative and courageous measures to help the people of Mali unite around a common future. At the same time, the Government is resuming its immense work on political and institutional reform with a view to adapting our institutions to Mali's current realities and enabling our governance system to respond effectively to the legitimate demands of our people.

The centre of our country continues to be affected by indiscriminate terrorist attacks that have resulted in many casualties, including among members of Mali's defence and security forces and innocent civilians. Thanks to the operationalization of the integrated security plan for the central regions, whose relevance is noted by the Secretary-General in his report, several State representatives and decentralized structures have returned to the most remote areas, much to people's relief. The school year has begun. The Head of Government, Mr. Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, whose efforts have been lauded, visited those areas this month to mark the State's return, attend the start of the school year and distribute food aid in areas affected by insecurity or natural disasters. However, given the scale of the situation, it is necessary to maintain and even strengthen aid programmes administered by the specialized agencies of the United Nations and other competent bodies.

We are concerned about the funding gap in the 2018 humanitarian response plan, whose requirements total $330 million. Only 32 per cent of that sum has been raised, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report. That is why the Government of Mali joins the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in launching a strong appeal to marshal additional financial resources to support Government efforts to implement assistance plans in response to multifaceted humanitarian crises, including plans for the return of displaced persons, returnees and basic social services.

I would like to turn now to the issue of human rights. The Government of Mali remains very concerned about respect for human rights in general, and human rights in particular — a focus that is consistent with our history and Mali's international commitments. The State of Mali is aware of its primary responsibility to protect people and their property, and the Government remains determined to continue and even strengthen the appropriate measures to ensure that human rights are respected, in particular those of our people. That is why all reported cases or allegations of violations are systematically investigated by the competent national structures. Disciplinary measures have already been taken against those suspected of violating the rights of individuals, even before investigations have been completed. In that regard, we remain open to all forms of cooperation in the areas of training, the sharing of experience or technical or financial support. That said, it should be recalled that, in accordance with paragraph 51 of the Secretary-General's report, most abuses are perpetrated by violent extremist groups, which, in their destructive fury, do not spare civilians or members of Malian or foreign forces.

Moreover, the Government agrees with the Secretary-General that any exit strategy must take into account the regional dimension, which is, regrettably, marked by an exponential increase in transnational organized crime. That was the reason for establishing the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, which seeks to unite the efforts and actions of the five countries concerned in a comprehensive approach to effectively combat terrorists and drug-trafficking groups that have plagued our entire subregion, especially since the collapse of the Libyan State in 2011. We take this opportunity to request once again that the Council provide the Joint Force with an adequate mandate and sustainable resources, including through the United Nations, to enable it to discharge its mission as it sees fit, for the benefit of the people of the Sahel and the rest of the world.

I would like to conclude as I began, by reiterating the gratitude of the people of Mali to the United Nations and all of our bilateral and multilateral partners for their continued multifaceted support for the crisis-recovery process in Mali. Above all, I would like to assure the Council of the resolve of the President of the Republic of Mali, the Government and signatory movements to be relentless in the diligent and inclusive implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

emanating from the Algiers process. In that regard, we attach particular importance to the relevant provisions of resolution 2423 (2018), in particular paragraphs 4, 5 and 6.

Lastly, I again pay tribute to all victims — civilian and military, Malian and non-Malian — who have lost their lives in the line of duty in Mali. I would like to spare a thought for the twenty-third French soldier to die in Mali, only a few days ago. I wish a speedy recovery to the Chadian five soldiers who were wounded in Mali. Of course, I cannot forget our own forces and civilians.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.